THE MARCH OF FATE

B. L. FARJEON

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THE MARCH OF FATE.

A Novel.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF

"GREAT PORTER SQUARE," "TOILERS OF BABYLON,"
"A YOUNG GIRL'S LIFE," "THE MYSTERY OF M. FELIX," &c.

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CONTENTS.

The First Link—Supplied by Mr. Millington of Shepherd's Bush.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	An Invitation to Chudleigh	1
II.	Miss Haldane's Birthday	9
III.	A Dinner and an Interruption	22
IV.	The Story of Honoria	31
V.	Rachel Diprose	46
VI.	The Lake of Lilies	59
VII.	Off to London	74
VIII.	Simpson is Inquisitive	90
IX.	Mr. Haldane Explains Himself	104
X.	Honoria Disappears	119
XI.	Simpson Perseveres	131

The Second Link—Supplied by Mr. Barlow, Private Inquiry, Surrey Street, W.C.

CHAP.		PAGE
XII.	Mr. Barlow	145
XIII.	An Old Story	160
XIV.	Betrayed	174
XV.	Mr. Barlow at Work	186
XVI.	Adeline Ducroz's Diary	191
XVII.	The Diary Continued	207

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THE MARCH OF FATE.

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The First Link—Supplied by Mr. Millington of Shepherd's Bush.

CHAPTER I.

AN INVITATION TO CHUDLEIGH.

It is now four years since I received a note from Mr. Haldane, of Manor Hall, Chudleigh Park, requesting me to call upon him on a little matter of business. Under ordinary circumstances my reply would have been that I had given up business, and that I regretted I could not tear myself away from my garden and birds, and my pipe and newspaper, of all of which I am particularly fond, but I had special reasons for reading his note twice over before deciding what to do about it. And having read the letter a

second time I put it in my pocket, and stepped into my garden in a brown study.

When a man is in a brown study, a pipe assists him, so I lit mine ; and motion assists him, so I paced the nicely gravelled paths, up one side and down the other, revolving the subject in my mind without arriving at a definite conclusion. It was my lark which brought me to a full stop. As a rule the notes of an imprisoned lark are apt to become a trifle shrill, but this is not the case with my bird, whose trilling is remarkably soft and dulcet. I suppose it is mere sentiment for me to say that I could never bring myself to eat larks in a pie, or roasted before the fire, which I regard as barbarism. Big birds I like, but these tiny creatures, which in my mind are associated with blue clouds and flowers and summer days, should be allowed to go free to gladden the world with their harmony. You will see by this remark that I preach what I do not practise ; otherwise I should open the cage of my lark, whose outdoor life is passed just

below my bedroom window, and who wakes me in the morning to remind me that the most beautiful part of the day is waiting for me. It is a summons not to be neglected, so up I get and work in the garden till George, or the little maid in our service, comes and tells me that breakfast is ready.

Well, as I was saying, when I went into the garden the lark was piping away most industriously, and it continued to pipe as I trod the new gravel down. Suddenly it stopped, and the silence that ensued was so surprising that I stopped too, and my brown study came to an end; and at that very moment George walked out of the house and joined me.

"Hallo, George," said I.

"Hallo, father," said he.

Let me set things clear about myself and him—as to what kind of persons we are, I mean.

As a young man I started upon the active duties of life in the service of Her Gracious Majesty; enamoured of red coats and drums

I enlisted for a soldier, and being wounded in one of our little wars in Africa was sent home invalided, unfit for further service. Then I became associated with an old friend, who kept a private enquiry office. It luckily happened about that time that a small legacy fell to me, and my friend proposed that I should invest it in his business and become a partner. I agreed, and we were so successful that I retired at the end of sixteen years with an income sufficient for my wants. The business is still carried on by my partner in his own name, Barlow, with a Co. tacked to it. My name, Millington, was never used in the concern. When I sailed from England for Africa I left a wife and child behind me, and when I returned my wife was dead, which was a severe blow, for she was a good creature, and we loved each other. But George was spared, and a great blessing the young fellow has been to me.

He is a working carpenter, sober, steady, and loyal. A year or so before I received Mr. Haldane's note my lad was sent down to

Manor Hall, Chudleigh Park, to assist in some alterations there. He was away three months, and he came back mad in love with a maid in the service of Mr. Haldane's only daughter, Miss Agnes Haldane. What had passed between George and pretty Rachel Diprose I did not exactly know, but I had an uncomfortable suspicion that the girl was playing fast and loose with him, as girls often do with straightforward men like my lad. They corresponded, letters passing between them about once a week, and one reason, I think, why I was suspicious of Rachel Diprose was that she wrote too good a hand for a lady's maid. It is an odd confession, but I should have been better pleased if she had written more like a servant who had received an imperfect education.

I had, as was to be expected, a great desire to see the girl who, if my boy's hopes were to be realised, was to become my daughter-in-law, but she had no friends in London, and had, in fact, never been in the city. Consequently there was no house in which she

could stop except at an inn or a lodging-house, which would not be proper for a single young girl. It would not do to ask her to stop in mine, there being no elderly female to look after her, and George sleeping in it—though, for the matter of that, he could have got a room elsewhere; but I decided that it would not do. Nor would it look well for me to go expressly to Chudleigh Park to take observations of Rachel Diprose. She might think I was come to spy upon her, for the purpose of seeing if she was good enough for my lad, and this was a proceeding which any girl of spirit would resent.

That is how the matter stood when George joined me in the garden.

"I've got something to tell you, old man," I said.

"Fire away, father," he said.

"I have received a letter from Chudleigh Park," I said.

"Not from Rachel!" he cried.

"No, not from her. What should she have to write to me about? It's from Mr.

Haldane. He wants to see me, and I've half a mind to go. It would give me an opportunity of seeing Rachel."

"I should like you to see her," said George.

"Of course you would. I had some acquaintance with Mr. Haldane when I was partner in Barlow & Co. But it's not so much for his sake as for yours that I am inclined to go to Chudleigh Park."

"It is very good of you, father. Yes, go."

"George," said I, "when do you think of getting married?"

"I can't get Rachel to name the day," replied George. "She declares she will never marry till her young mistress is happily settled."

"Isn't that rather hard on you?"

"I should have preferred it the other way, but I love her all the more for her faithfulness to Miss Haldane. It isn't a bad quality, is it, dad?"

"It is a very fine quality. Perhaps you can tell me whether there is any likeli-

hood of Miss Haldane being soon happily settled?"

"I don't quite know," said George, ruefully. "Things seem a bit muddled. I've got an idea that Mr. Haldane wants his daughter to marry a gentleman she doesn't care for."

"That's bad. Has she set her heart on someone else?" George pursed his lip, and I did not press the point. "I shall start for Chudleigh Park to-morrow."

"All right, father. Give Rachel my love, and say I'm longing to see her. O, I may as well tell you that there's to be fine doings in the park to-morrow. It's Miss Haldane's birthday, and there'll be games and prizes, and cake and tea for the people in the village. You will be there in time for all the fun of the fair."

CHAPTER II.

MISS HALDANE'S BIRTHDAY.

It would be difficult to find in all Buckinghamshire a more picturesque estate than Chudleigh Park. I haven't the gift of describing scenery well, men and women being more in my way, but you may be able to draw the picture for yourself out of the following bald material. An enclosed park of a hundred acres or so, at the principal gate of which is the keeper's lodge, an ivy-covered cottage twinkling with diamonded windows. There are footpaths in all directions, and a broad carriage-road leads to the doors of the old Manor House, which is built in the Tudor style. The spaces of grass and velvet moss are wonderfully well kept, not the least sign of litter or disorder meeting the eye whichever way it turns. Upland and lowland are dotted with fine old

oaks, and on the east side of the park, where it joins Chudleigh Woods, is a broad lake covered with lilies. Midway across this lake a rustic bridge saves you the trouble of walking to either end, and the moment you are on the other side you plunge into the tangles of a lovely English forest. It is of vast extent, stretching for miles; there are acres of foreign ferns, and acres of wild flowers, and it would be hard to say at which period of the year the woods are most beautiful.

I think I have said enough to show that Chudleigh Park is a place in which Nature seems to invite a man to happiness. But black care finds its way into palaces as well as into hovels, and I am not at all sure with respect to this visitor, whether the poor man's abode hasn't the best of it.

I had written to Mr. Haldane to say that I was coming down to Chudleigh Park, but as I did not mention the time or day of my arrival I felt myself free for a few hours when I reached the village. This enabled

me to view the festivities in which the inhabitants were indulging. It was a declared holiday all over the place, and I found myself in the midst of the familiar features of a country fair. Rather a second-hand exhibition, but there was no lack of fun. Some caravans had come, and were doing good business. The outside shows, of course, were the main attraction. There were the fat woman and the man skeleton, and the coil of deadly cobras; there were clowns, and dwarfs, and giants, and acrobats; and there was a tamer of wild beasts, with his foot on a tiger, holding two lions by the throat, and glaring at a dozen others, who, but for his eagle eye, would have torn him to pieces. In the park the entertainments were of a better quality. A cricket match was being played, serious and comic races were to be run, the school children were to sing and recite, and there were prizes for everybody it seemed, in money and books and articles for home use and decoration. Very old and very young people were especially catered

for. The velvet spaces of the beautiful park were gay with flags and carriages and music. Some creditable waxworks were being exhibited; there were two capital Punch and Judy shows; here a conjuror, surrounded by a delighted crowd, was displaying his skill, and at a little distance was a tent in which a fortune-teller revealed the past and foretold the future. I had not long been in Chudleigh Park before I learned that Mr. Haldane was not merely a rich gentleman living in private splendour upon his income; he was more king than master of the vast estate, and he was spoken of as a proud and haughty gentleman, as one who was feared rather than loved. What, then, was the secret of this open-hearted holiday-making, in which a sympathetic desire to make those beneath him happy was so conspicuous? I soon discovered that the credit belonged to his daughter Agnes. Wherever I went I heard nothing but praise of Miss Haldane's sweetness and goodness, and it was something in favour of Rachel Diprose that she should be

so firmly attached to a mistress for whom every one had a good word.

"Bless her sweet face!" said an old woman. "She's an angel from heaven!" And she recounted a story of kind deeds which made my heart warm as I listened. Her story was followed by others from those who had received kindnesses at Miss Haldane's hands. Generally in such scenes there is to be detected an element of dissent or discontent from some carper, a discordant note which mars the harmony, but it was not so here: the affection expressed for the young lady at the Manor House was perfect and sincere.

This set me thinking. Hitherto I had felt no curiosity concerning the unrevealed matter of business upon which I had been summoned to Chudleigh Park, and I had assented to Mr. Haldane's request to see me for the sole reason that I desired to make the acquaintance of Rachel Diprose and judge for myself whether she was a girl likely to make my son happy. But now my attention

wandered from her to the master of the estate. I had become interested in his daughter, and should be glad of an opportunity to serve her. Why this thought should obtrude itself in connection with my mission, the particulars of which I had yet to learn, I may be permitted to explain.

Mr. Haldane had requested me to call upon him on a little matter of business. Well and good; that sounded innocent enough, and as if there was not much in it. But I knew better; my experience had taught me that there must be a great deal in it. Mr. Haldane wished to see me, and had selected me as his agent, because of my previous connection with a private inquiry office which had already executed some commisions for him. Now, when a gentleman goes to such a source for assistance, the matter he discloses is in every instance a matter which he is anxious to keep from public knowledge, and in nearly every instance which he wishes to keep from the knowledge of his family. What concerns

the gentleman directly concerns his immediate family indirectly; if he fears exposure, be sure there is some disgrace attaching to it, and disgrace to him means disgrace to them. Why, there are numbers of offices in London which are filled with ghosts and skeletons. You enter one and see neatly arranged on shelves a number of tin boxes, each securely locked, and each with a name or mark upon it, denoting to whom it belongs. The place you stand in is a sepulchre. The boxes, smothered with dust, upon which you gaze, are coffins in which ugly skeletons are buried. Open one and up the mystery jumps and stares you in the face, shocking your sensibilities and causing you to raise your hands in amazement at the revelation. What! Your old friend who poses before the world as the pink of morality, as a man of stainless character and honour, a philanthropist, perhaps, or a statesman, or a teacher of morals, whose homilies upon conscience edify the public—is it possible that he could have been guilty of this foul wrong? Quite

possible, my friend. Do not be too curious to pry into the hidden life of the man or woman in whose society you delight, and whose presence in your home gives pleasure to you and your wife and children. Turn your eyes inwards, and let sleeping dogs lie.

Well, then, I argued this way. Mr. Haldane had sought my services in a matter which, dragged before the public, would cause unhappiness to the young lady who seemed to be loved by everyone who knew her, and who was spoken of as an angel from heaven. Interested in her happiness was a young girl my son George worshipped. For his sake, for my own, for the sake of Rachel Diprose, and last, but not least, for the sake of sweet Miss Haldane, I would undertake the task which Mr. Haldane had it in his mind to entrust to me. When Miss Haldane was happily settled Rachel would consent to make my George happy. It was clearly my duty, therefore, to do what I could towards Miss Haldane's happy settlement in life. A roundabout way of reasoning, I dare say, and

founded upon mere conjecture. How far I was right or wrong will be seen as we go on.

I had wandered out of the beaten paths during my musings, and now I wandered into them again, and mixed with the holiday folk. Hearing the voices of children singing I walked forward and stood on the outskirts of the circle of people who were listening to the pleasant performance. The school children were marshalled in order, and had just commenced an original song composed by a local poet in honour of Miss Haldane. The children, who all had new frocks on, had been carefully drilled, and sang admirably; and standing by himself was the local poet, with his hands clasped, listening to his verses in a state of agonised rapture, convinced, no doubt, that the eyes of the world were upon him. The song being ended, the little girl who sang the solo part was called up to the gentry, and a young lady presented her with a book. Who this young lady was was made clear to me by the local butcher calling out, "Three cheers for Miss Haldane," which were lustily and

heartily given without regard to the number. The village people waved hats and handkerchiefs, and would have cried themselves hoarse had not the fugleman, exhausted with his efforts, come to a sudden stop, whereat they followed suit. Partially recovering, the butcher demanded three cheers for Mr. Haldane, which also were given, with less heartiness, but still with some show of enthusiasm. Miss Haldane, who wore a dress of pure white, blushed prettily, and nodded with much sweetness, and turned to her father with smiles saying something to him, which, of course, at the distance I was from her, I could not hear. The most beautiful season of the year is spring, as it is the most beautiful season of life, and surely a sweeter exemplification of this was never seen than in the person of Miss Haldane. Her face was the loveliest I had ever beheld, and there was a quality of goodness in it which seemed to influence all surrounding things, and to invest them with something of her own charm of sweetness and tenderness. When she dis-

missed the happy child who had sung the solo, she called up the poet to receive his meed of praise and thanks. He behaved very sheepishly, and scarcely dared to touch the hand she held out to him, but the trying and triumphant ordeal was soon over, and he retired to dream of future fame and glory. At this moment, a man, who had approached me without my observing him, touched my arm.

"You are a stranger here," he said.

"Yes," I answered; "I only arrived to-day."

"Mr. Haldane," said the man, "has sent me to enquire who you are."

I took a card from my pocket, on which my name was printed, without my address, simply "Mr. Millington," and handing it to him, said that perhaps he would take it to Mr. Haldane. He looked at it, looked at me, and went away, and I saw him give the card to Mr. Haldane. Returning soon, the man said:

"Mr. Haldane would like to speak to you."

I followed him, and observed that Mr. Haldane was moving away from his companions, with the evident intention of speaking privately to me. Upon our coming together, the man who had conducted me stood a little apart.

"I saw you among the people," said Mr. Haldane, "and knew you were a stranger."

"You have sharp eyes," I thought, but I said nothing to that effect, only that I had written to him that I was coming to Chudleigh Park in compliance with his request.

"I received your letter," he said, "but you did not inform me you were coming to-day." He paused a moment. "I cannot speak to you till to-morrow."

"That will be convenient to me, sir," I said.

He called to the man who had brought me to him. "Simpson, see that this gentleman has a room somewhere in the village to-night."

"Yes, sir," said Simpson.

I was surprised at his reference to me as "this gentleman," but I set it down to his not wishing to make my name known. One thing leads to another, you see, and when you wish to keep things dark you cannot be too careful. But he could not keep my name from Simpson, who had seen it on my card.

"That is all, I think," said Mr. Haldane. "I shall be disengaged to-morrow at twelve."

"I will call upon you punctually, sir," I said.

He nodded and walked away, but he had not gone a dozen yards, before he turned and beckoned to me. I went to him, Simpson stopping discreetly at a distance.

"You need not say anything," he said, "about my sending for you."

"No one shall know, sir," I said.

He nodded again, and walked off, this time for good.

CHAPTER III.

A DINNER AND AN INTERRUPTION.

Simpson sauntered towards me with a careless, unconcerned air, as though the idea of introducing himself had just occurred to him. There is something in the manner and bearing of certain classes of men which at once betrays their calling. For instance, a jockey. Seeing one even for the first time, who could mistake him? You look at his face, and you wonder how he feels off a horse. He is like a sailor walking along macadamised roads after a long voyage. A butcher, too. It is impossible for him to disguise himself. In private life he is generally respectably dressed; his clothes are remarkably new, and his boots and hats have a wonderful polish on them; but you cast just one glance at him, and you see the inner man, in flannel apron, knife in hand, with a "buy, buy, buy!"

expression on his features. The same with valets and body-servants. The nicely smoothed hair, the half-sliding, half-confident motion of their bodies, the cut of their clothes, when they wear their own, the quietly observant eye, unmistakably proclaim their calling. It was Simpson's, as I correctly judged; he was Mr. Haldane's valet, and it was not long before he volunteered the information, which was thrown out as a feeler, and as an invitation to a like confidence on my part. But I was on my guard; my plan was to ask questions, and to answer as few as possible. So I fenced and parried, and Simpson made no demur which gave me rather a high opinion of his abilities.

All this time you may be sure I had not forgotten Rachel Diprose, but I had seen no one resembling the portrait George had of her; and it occurred to me that Simpson was the man to enlighten me as to what kind of girl she was. Upon my prompting he furnished me with an account of the domestics in Mr. Haldane's establishment, from the

housekeeper and butler downwards; he told me their several names, and I noticed, when he mentioned Rachel Diprose, that there was just that difference in his tone which denoted that she was a person who held a special place in his mind. I began to speculate whether Simpson was a married man.

"The housekeeper and butler are married, I think you said?"

"Yes," he answered.

"That must make it comfortable for them," I observed. "Good situations, everything provided, no butchers' bills to pay, and putting by a pound now and then for a rainy day."

"They've nothing to complain of," said Simpson.

"Some gentlemen," I said, "object to keeping married people in their employ, but Mr. Haldane is more liberal-minded."

"That doesn't prove liberal-mindedness."

"Perhaps not; I'm speaking in a general way. Now, you"—and I cocked my eye knowingly and reflectively at him—"I should

take you to be a married man, with a charming wife and family."

"Wrong. I'm a single man."

"All the more agreeable for you," I said, shifting my ground. "There you are, a bachelor, with a lot of nice girls about him that he can pick and choose from. You must be in clover. There's pretty Rachel Diprose, now, a favourite with her young mistress, and I'll wager with a bit of money put by."

He looked at me, seemed suddenly to remember something and instantly shut up. Which caused me to drift into other subjects.

We had walked out of the park and into the village while we were conversing, and Simpson stopped before a public-house called "The Brindled Cow."

"You can get a bed here," he said. "I'll make it all right with the landlord."

"And perhaps," I said, "you won't mind taking a drink with me. I feel a little strange, being in a strange part of the country, and shall be glad of company. If ever you come

to London we might spend an evening together."

Had I thought twice I should not have thrown out the hint. He took it up quickly.

"I'll drink with you with pleasure," he said; "and I'll spend an evening with you in London when I've got one to spare. What's your address?"

I was fairly beaten, I own, and, without giving him offence, could not refuse to tell him where I lived. Then we went into the inn.

The arrangement for a bed being made, I inquired what particular tipple my new friend preferred, and asked the landlord to join us.

"Spirits just before going to bed," said Simpson, "beer in the morning, and port wine in the evening. That's my system. The landlord has a good bottle of port wine in his cellar."

It being evening now, I called for the bottle of good port wine, in accordance with Simpson's system, and then, at his suggestion,

we adjourned to a small room in which there was a bagatelle table, and began to drink and smoke and play. I could have beaten him easily, but I allowed him to beat me, and as he pocketed the twopences for which we played I saw that losing was a winning game for me. I drove another nail in by remarking that I had had no dinner, and asking would he join me. Certainly he would, he replied; it was all hurry-scurry up at the Hall; and if I wanted to know what duck and green peas were like, the landlord of "The Brindled Cow" would show me.

So the dinner was ordered, and we continued to play bagatelle till it was ready.

"You're a man after my own heart," said Simpson, as he polished off the choicest slices of the duck, and ladled down the green peas, which really were delicious. "I didn't take to you at first, but it shows how a man may be mistaken. What's all that row about outside?"

The landlord, who had entered to attend to our wants, replied that Miss

Haldane had come from the park to the village, to see how the people were enjoying themselves; but the sounds we heard were the reverse of festive. A woman's shrill voice and excited murmurs reached our ears. Simpson went to the window, and exclaimed:

"By the Lord! It's that girl Honoria come back! There's mischief brewing."

And out he went, leaving, to my surprise, some dainty morsels on his plate. I hastened after him and, keeping close, pushed my way through a number of people gathered round two women, whom they hemmed in. One was a woman of middle age, and it was her shrill voice I had heard. She was standing over the form of another female, poorly dressed, whose crouching attitude prevented me from seeing her features.

"Here she is, the slut!" cried the angry woman. "Here she is, come back with her shame and her brazen face! She commenced young enough, didn't she? But young as she is, she's old enough for sin. Have you

brought a baby with you, you huzzy, or have you dropped it in the water? Where are my earrings and brooch you stole before you ran away, you thief, you? Isn't there a policeman here to take the drab into custody? I'll drag her to prison with my own hands if no one 'll help me!"

Thus she went on, screaming at the top of her voice, and had it not been for me would have laid violent hands upon the frightened creature she was reviling and accusing. She paused to recover her breath, and as she did so some person said:

"'Sh! Miss Haldane is coming."

There was a sudden stillness, and the ranks opened for the young lady to pass through. She came close to the accuser and the accused, and, stooping, placed her hand upon the shoulder of the crouching figure. At this touch the woman raised her head, and seeing who was by her side, clutched Miss Haldane's dress convulsively, as if for protection from the enemies who surrounded her. The upraised face was wild, and full of anguish and

terror, but it was scarcely less beautiful than that of her saviour.

"Oh, Honoria, Honoria!" murmured Miss Haldane, and she knelt and drew the face of the unfortunate girl to her breast.

There was a heavenly pity in her eyes, a world of tenderness in her voice. An angel from Heaven, indeed, was this sweet girl.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF HONORIA.

A FEW minutes later I was standing by the window of the room in which Simpson and I had but partly dined. There was no person in the room but myself, and I could have been more sociably employed had I descended to the bar of "The Brindled Cow" and mixed with my fellow man. But there were drawbacks to this course. My fellow man, as he was now represented in the bar of the inn, was distinctly noisy and unruly, having drunk more than was good for him, and I objected to his company in that condition. Therefore I was consulting my inclination in avoiding him, and I was lonely from choice.

What had occurred with respect to the incident referred to at the end of the last chapter was this:

When Miss Haldane drew the face of Honoria to her breast, shielding her, as it were, from the fury of the woman who was accusing her, she looked up at the people who surrounded them. Not one in the crowd spoke a word, and the only sounds that were heard proceeded from the sobbing girl who lay in the arms of her protector. Presently Miss Haldane, whispering something in Honoria's ear, rose, holding Honoria's hand, who rose with her. The expression on Miss Haldane's face, as she looked around, was one of reproach and pity. Honoria's head was sunk low upon her bosom, and she did not once lift it. Miss Haldane's silent appeal to the villagers caused them to fall apart, and a free passage was opened for the two girls, who passed through it slowly and in silence. They walked through the narrow street in the direction of the park, and in a few moments were out of sight. Only one person followed them, walking some distance behind. This person was Simpson, for whose return I was awaiting with a natural curiosity to hear

the story which I knew must be attached to the singular and exciting incident.

It was an hour before Simpson rejoined me, and he came into the room briskly. There was satisfaction in his eyes as he observed that the cloth was still on the table.

"That's all over," he said, "and now I suppose we can finish our dinner."

"Yes," I said. "I ordered them to keep the sweets hot, but the duck must be cold by this time."

"Cold duck is delicious," said the voracious Simpson. "Let's have it up."

What remained of the duck was brought up, and Simpson was mainly instrumental in polishing it off. Then we had the sweets, then the cheese and watercress, and the bottle of port being finished, I called for another. It had the effect of making Simpson mellow —and communicative.

"That was a curious scene," he remarked.

"It was," I said. "Miss Haldane has a kind heart."

"A lady may go too far though," he

observed. "I can understand people with third-class tickets trying to get into first-class carriages, but I am hanged if I can understand the other way of things."

"There can be no doubt," I said, "that Miss Haldane is first-class, and the girl with the strange name third."

"It is a strange name," said Simpson; "all very well for a lady, but it's handicapping a common girl too heavily, likely to turn her head, you know."

"She belongs to the village," I hazarded.

"In a sort of fashion. She lived here long enough."

"Her parents must be dreadfully cut up."

"She hasn't any. A fine-looking girl, Millington," said Simpson, becoming familiar, which I set down to the wine.

"I just caught a glimpse of her." Half-a-dozen of "The Brindled Cow's" best cigars were brought in, at my order. "Do you smoke?"

"Every gentleman smokes. Thank you. As I said, a fine-looking girl. A saucy face

—and such eyes ! A different kind of beauty from Miss Haldane's, but some prefer one sort, some another. I like 'em dapperer and trimmer, not so brunetty."

"Is there any truth in the accusation the woman brought against her?"

"There's no saying. She might have taken the brooch and earrings, then again she mightn't. She was fond of finery, and that tells against her. There's no fear of her being put in prison ; she's lucky in having a lady like Miss Haldane on her side. If it was her father, it would be another pair of shoes. He'd give her three months and take a pleasure in it. Would you like to hear the story?"

"These stories are always interesting," I said ; "doubly so when they are told over a friendly glass."

"There's a mystery about her birth," said Simpson, who was in the humour to hear himself talk. "Seven miles from here lies the village of Bittern, a quarter the size of this. Seventeen or eighteen years ago a

woman comes from somewhere, and takes a cottage there. Four shillings a week she pays for it; three rooms, bedroom, parlour, and kitchen. She brings with her a baby, this same Honoria. No one knows anything about the woman, and it is supposed that the child is her own. How does she pay her way? She receives every Tuesday morning a post-office order for eighteen shillings, which leaves her fourteen shillings a week to live on, after paying her rent. With only a baby to keep she can manage very well upon that. After a while it comes to be understood that Honoria is not her own child, and that she is taking care of her for somebody. It is nobody's business, and nobody has anything to say about it; and so the woman and child live in the cottage till Honoria is seven years old. Before she gets to that age it is noticed that the eighteen shillings a week does not come as regularly as it used to. How that gets to be known is through the baker, who keeps the post-office, and who cashes the post-office orders the woman receives. A year

later, when Honoria is eight, something of more importance occurs. The woman disappears and Honoria is left to take care of herself. She is too young to do that, and so she becomes a waif and stray, picking up a bit of grub here, and a bit of grub there, and sleeping anywhere and everywhere. When the woman disappears she is in arrears for rent, and her few bits of sticks are sold to settle arrears; then the cottage is let to somebody else, and Honoria is thrown pretty well stark naked on the world. There's no saying what would have become of her if it hadn't been for Miss Haldane, who was no older than Honoria at the time, but who, riding through Bittern, sees a little child sitting by a hedge, sobbing her heart out. Down my young lady insists upon getting, and she goes up to Honoria, just as she did outside an hour ago, and sits down by her side, and gives her some sweets, and winds up by bringing Honoria into the carriage and riding back with her here to Chudleigh. If Miss Haldane had been riding with her father

this wouldn't have happened, because he's not given to noticing poor people, but there was only the nurse in the carriage with my young lady, and so she had her way. Now *I* come into the story. Mr. Haldane sends for me, and says that his daughter has brought some wretched child into the village, and asks me to find out who she is. That is how I got the particulars I've just told you of. While I was gathering them Honoria is kept with the servants at the Hall, and Miss Haldane insists upon looking after her, and does all sorts of absurd things. If she had been allowed to have her own way entirely Honoria would have slept with her, but they put a stopper to that. Mr. Haldane, I think, saw Honoria once, but I am not sure about that, and it isn't of any consequence. I came back with my report, and Mr. Haldane said that Honoria couldn't remain at the Hall, and that I'd better find some woman in the village, who, for two or three shillings a week, would take care of the child. That wasn't a difficult matter, and Honoria goes to live with Mrs.

Porter, the woman who says she's been robbed of her brooch and earrings. Till Honoria is twelve years old the steward gives me the money every week to pay Mrs. Porter, but then Miss Haldane, who has more pocket money than she knows what to do with, takes the matter out of the steward's hands, and settles with Mrs. Porter herself. And a pretty penny Mrs. Porter makes out of her."

Simpson pausing here to pour himself out another glass of port, I put in a word.

"Mr. Haldane has a stronger will than his daughter."

"No doubt of that. He's master—O, yes, he's master."

"Why did he allow his daughter to take this delicate affair out of his hands, she being at the time only twelve years of age?"

"He didn't trouble himself about it. I don't know that he ever inquired after Honoria, or ever stepped a yard out of his road to see her."

"Would you like a whisky and soda?" I rang the bell.

"You're a good sort. I'll finish Honoria, and then I'll take my nap. It'll freshen me up for what I've got to do at the Manor House to-night. There's a grand ball to be given there, and I don't intend to be out of it. Well, then, Honoria grows up, and Miss Haldane grows up, and I never saw a lady take such an interest in a poor girl before. She gives her dresses and bits of finery, and she has her taught, and altogether makes as much of her as if they were equals. That's the way things went on till about this time last year, and then all the village rings with the news that Honoria's run away."

"With whom?"

"Nobody knows. The only sure thing is that she's gone; and Mrs. Porter goes about saying that the girl has robbed her. She makes out a list of the missing things—the brooch, the earrings, a shawl, a pair of boots, and some bits of old china."

"In the accusation she brought against

Honoria this evening," I remarked, "she made no mention of the latter articles."

"No, because they were recovered. A tramp who'd been seen in the village was taken up a week afterwards, and everything but the brooch and earrings was tracked; he had stolen and sold them."

"It stands to reason that he stole the missing things as well."

"Mrs. Porter says no, and sticks to it that Honoria stole the jewellery. She never said so in Miss Haldane's presence, so that my young lady has just heard of it for the first time."

"I, for one, don't believe the poor girl is a thief. If she were, she would never have shown her face here again. What construction, apart from the missing jewellery, was put upon her running away?"

Simpson's blinking eyes were fixed on my face. "What construction would you put upon it?"

"Well, well," I said, "we are always ready to be uncharitable. But after all, the

girl might have left the village to better herself."

"Honestly?" asked Simpson.

"Yes, honestly," I replied, feeling nettled with myself because of intruding doubts, and knowing that I was only championing Honoria for the sake of Miss Haldane.

"You don't mean it, Millington. Bring your common sense to bear; bring your knowledge of the world to bear. If she had gone away honestly she would have left the village in the light of day; she would have said good-bye to her friends. But she goes away in the dead of night; she says good bye to nobody; and the clerk at the railway station swears she didn't travel to wherever she went by rail. There's very little traffic at the railway station here, and no one in the village can go away by train without it's being known."

"How did Miss Haldane take her disappearance?"

"Never said a word to any of us about it. She was paler and more melancholy than

she'd been, especially when she passed Mrs. Porter's door ; and of course none of the villagers spoke to her about Honoria."

"Miss Haldane might have heard from her."

"She might ; but if she did she kept it to herself. The mystery to me is, why she ever came back. And now, if you've no objection, I'll take my forty winks."

He lay back in his chair and closed his eyes, with a smug expression of satisfaction on his face. Without a doubt Simpson was a gentleman on very good terms with himself. I contemplated him a moment or two in silence. What he had imparted to me had increased instead of allaying my curiosity.

"Simpson," I said, rather sharply.

"Hallo!" he cried, with a start, opening his eyes lazily.

"Just one question or two before you go off."

"About that girl Honoria?"

"Yes, about Honoria."

"Bother Honoria," he said, and closed his eyes again.

"Come," I said, in a coaxing tone, "like a good fellow now. It won't take you a minute."

"I'm not going to open my eyes again, I tell you that, Millington. Well, what is it?"

"Did she have any sweethearts in the village?"

"All the young men in the place were sweet on her," he answered, drowsily. "Eyes like sloes, hair down to the waist, cherry lips——" He smacked his own.

"Any regular sweethearts, I mean?"

"Not one that she encouraged out and out. Let me go to sleep."

But I was determined he should not till he had answered me. I shook him smartly.

"Too bad, Millington; too bad," he murmured. "Where's your consideration?"

"When she disappeared from the village did anyone else disappear at the same time?"

"Not a living soul, man or woman."

"Did she go to London?"

"Not knowing, can't say."

These four words dropped slowly from his lips, and were followed by a snore. Simpson was off, and I could not get anyther word out of him.

CHAPTER V.

RACHEL DIPROSE.

THERE was nothing inviting in the prospect of sitting in the room with my sleeping guest. He was snoring and choking as he slumbered, and his mouth was wide open. Blowing out the candles to prevent a possible accident I left the room. "The Brindled Cow" was doing a rattling business, which the landlord was attending to with tact and conscientiousness, persuading those who had had a little more than enough to heed the advice of their wives, and go home like good sensible souls, for the sake of themselves and the quality of the Manor House, of whom it was evident they stood in wholesome dread. As I moved among these scenes I could not help reflecting upon the small difference that existed between life in an obscure village and life in the great Babylon from which I had journeyed

in the morning. What I had witnessed during the last few hours was pregnant proof of this. I thought of Honoria; of the accusation which had been brought against her, and which I felt was false; of the shame to which she had been brought, and which I felt was true; I thought of her champion, in whose sweet face shone purity and charity; I thought of the grand ball that was to be given presently at the Manor House; of the joy and gladness that would prevail; and as I dwelt upon the gay scene I saw a despairing girl to whom the world was a prison filled with threatening shadows. Virtue and vice, light and darkness, side by side.

A hand was laid upon my arm. I looked down, and saw a comely young woman, who looked up at me demurely.

"You were pointed out to me, sir," she said, "as Mr. Millington. I should have known you anywhere."

Pleasant eyes, pleasant features, and a pleasant voice.

"And I should have known you," I said,

holding out my hand in a fatherly way, "wherever I met you. How would you have recognised me?"

"By your likeness to George. How would you have recognised me, sir?"

"By your likeness to the portrait George is never tired of gazing at, my dear."

"I am glad to hear that, sir," said Rachel Diprose. "How is George, sir?"

"He is well, and sends you his love."

She moved a little into the light so that I could see her quite clearly. It was modestly done, and I was pleased at the action. I had had my doubts of Rachel; they grew weak as I gazed upon her pretty face.

"Have you come expressly from the Hall to see me?" I asked

"Yes, Miss Haldane sent me for you. She wants you to do her a service, and I said I was sure you would."

"Of course I will, my dear, but still I am puzzled a bit how this has come about. Throw a light on it, Rachel."

"It was in this way, sir. But we had

better walk to the Hall; we can talk more comfortably away from the crowd." She took my arm and we proceeded in the direction of the park. "Something occurred in the village that has made Miss Haldane very sad. I think you were there at the time."

I guessed that she referred to Honoria, and I said, "Yes, I was there." She continued:

"Miss Haldane saw you among the people, and knew you were a stranger. She spoke to me, and asked who you were. I said I would try and find out, and I went to Mr. Simpson and asked him. You may imagine how surprised I was when he told me your name was Millington, and that you had come to see Mr. Haldane upon business. I thought at first it was George, but his description of you as a middle-aged gentleman didn't fit George. I told Miss Haldane what Simpson said, and she asked if you could be trusted. I answered if you were George's father that I would trust you with my life, but that if you weren't I hadn't any opinion

to offer." As Rachel's hand was lying on my sleeve I put my disengaged hand upon it and patted it approvingly; the conviction was dawning upon me that George had made a good choice. "'If he is George's father,' she said then, 'ask him if he will come and speak to me.'"

"To do her a service?" I said.

"Yes," said Rachel, "to do her a service."

As she did not volunteer any information as to the nature of the service for which I was required, I forebore to press her, and inwardly commended her for her prudence. Having got thus far we fell into conversation about George, and that was a subject I could be eloquent upon. I said nothing that was not a pleasure for her to hear, and she fully repaid me by saying that George spoke of me exactly as I spoke of George.

"It would give my lad great joy," I said, "if you were nearer to each other. Sweethearting at a distance is not half as agreeable as when young people are together."

"But it can't be helped," said Rachel. "George knows that I have made up my mind not to leave my young lady till she is settled. I couldn't do it, Mr. Millington."

"Yes, he has told me so. Well, my dear, the sooner Miss Haldane is settled the better for all parties."

We were now at the Hall, and Rachel went to her young mistress.

"You mustn't mind if you are detained a little while," she said, and left me to myself for a quarter of an hour or so, at the end of which time she made her appearance again, and bade me follow her to Miss Haldane's room.

Miss Haldane was at dinner, Rachel whispered to me as we went upstairs, and she was presently to dress for the ball. All around me were evidences of state and grandeur, which none but a gentleman of great fortune could maintain. The servants were in handsome livery, and the passages and staircases were bright with lights and flowers. No one

took any notice of me, every person I saw being intent on business or pleasure.

Rachel took me into a room adjoining one in which, I judged, Miss Haldane was to dress. She went into this adjoining room, and presently Miss Haldane came from it, and greeted me gracefully; but there was trouble in her face.

"Rachel," said Miss Haldane, "I wish to speak to Mr. Millington alone. Remain in the other room in case I want you." When Rachel was gone she continued: "It is fortunate you are here, Mr. Millington, as I should not know whom else to trust. Everyone is so busy, and there are some who are apt to judge harshly." She paused, as if she found it difficult to speak of what was weighing on her mind. With abrupt decision, which denoted a certain strength of character, she said, "It is of the poor girl you saw in the village."

"You may speak freely to me, Miss Haldane," I said. "I will do whatever you desire, and you may trust me to act kindly."

"Thank you, Mr. Millington," she said; "your assurance is a great relief to me. Has anyone been telling you anything about her?"

"Some particulars of her residence in the village have reached me, and I am sorry for her."

She gave me a grateful look. "You must not believe all you hear, Mr. Millington. Honoria is a good girl, and was not satisfied with her position. When she went away, having no family here that had any claims upon her, it was with the intention to better herself. There was nothing wrong in that."

"Nothing, Miss Haldane."

"What Mrs. Porter accused her of is not true. It was unfortunate that she was robbed just at the time that Honoria left the village, but Honoria is not to be blamed for it. She could not have been happy with Mrs. Porter, and that must have been one reason for her sudden departure. Mr. Millington, do you think you can find her for me?"

"But she was with you two or three hours ago."

"I know. I brought her to the Hall, and asked the servants to be good to her, and to let me see her to-morrow when this busy time is over. I was greatly distressed when Rachel told me she had left the house."

"Do you know why she left?" I asked.

"No; nor does Rachel. But she has gone, and I am afraid to think what will become of her. She is quite penniless, Mr. Millington; she did not tell me so, but I am sure of it. I did not offer her money; I thought I would wait till to-morrow, and then I would decide how I could best assist her. Poor Honoria! She hasn't a friend, Mr. Millington."

"She has one very sincere friend, Miss Haldane."

"Indeed I would like to be; but how can I when I don't know where she is?"

"Before I can advise you, I should like to ascertain the cause of her leaving the Hall. If you can spare Rachel, and will receive me

again in a few minutes, I may see my way more clearly."

"Certainly." She called Rachel. "Rachel, go with Mr. Millington, and tell him what he wants to know. Bring him back to me when he is ready to come."

"Yes, Miss," said Rachel, and she and I left the room, and went together to the lower part of the house. I had something more than a suspicion of the reason of Honoria's hasty departure. Being given into the care of the servants she had met with just such treatment as might have been expected by any person who was a better judge of human nature than Miss Haldane. Black looks had been directed towards her, harsh words had been flung at her, she had been condemned without a trial. Stung to the soul the unhappy girl had fled, to hide herself—Where?

I did not make the inquiries myself, but, through Rachel, I learned all that I wanted to know. Reading between the lines, and reasoning out the bare particulars with which

she supplied me, the suspicion I had formed became a certainty; and thus armed I returned to Miss Haldane.

"Honoria will not come back to the Hall, Miss Haldane."

"Oh, Mr. Millington!"

"You spoke truly when you said that some people are apt to judge harshly. I am afraid that is the case with the servants here."

"But they have not heard what Honoria has to say!"

"If they did," I said, with gentle firmness, "it is not likely she would be believed."

With the same abrupt decision I had already noticed in her manner Miss Haldane said:

"Mr. Millington, Honoria must be found."

"I will endeavour to find her."

"Poor Honoria—poor Honoria! Think of the terrible night before her! Every house shut against her! Everyone she meets turning from her! Oh, Mr. Millington, if I had been a yoor girl it might have happened to me!"

"Never," I thought, but I held my tongue.

She took a purse from her pocket, and emptied it into my hands. There were six sovereigns and a few pieces of silver.

"I shall never be able to repay you," she said, "if you will find Honoria, and give her this, with my love and pity. You are a father, and will be tender to her. See that she has shelter to-night, and counsel her what to do to-morrow. If she will not come to me, ask her if I may come to her; and if she will not consent to this, beg her to write to me, and say that I will always, always be her friend."

She entrusted me with many more sweet messages of a similar nature, and I promised to do my best to carry out her wishes.

"There is something else, Mr. Millington. Go to Mrs. Porter in the morning, and ascertain what value she places upon the brooch and earrings which the tramp stole from her with the other things. Pay her whatever she asks, and I will give you the money. I will not have Honoria's name

coupled with any accusation of that kind, though I know the charge is false."

"I will do everything," I said, "in the way you wish it done."

"I am truly beholden to you," she said, shaking hands with me.

And so I bade her good-night, and went to find Honoria.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAKE OF LILIES.

I PROCEEDED in the direction of the village; not that I expected to find Honoria there, but it was likely I should be able to extract information from some one who saw her after she left the Hall. But I learned nothing. Not one of the persons to whom I spoke had seen anything of Honoria, and I found myself at a standstill. In a discontented mood I retraced my steps to the park, and wandered through the dark spaces, carefully scrutinizing any likely spot in which Honoria might have sought refuge for the night. I met with no success, however, and was debating where to proceed when I thought of Chudleigh Woods. For a stranger like myself to go there and search for a girl whose long residence in Chudleigh must have made its

intricacies familiar to her was a forlorn hope, but it was the only hope that remained, and I turned my face to the rustic bridge which spanned the lake of lilies. Having crossed this bridge I paused to decide which direction to take, to the right or to the left. Either way I was confronted with a tangle of trees which seemed to mock my efforts. Idly standing for a few moments on the edge of the lake I pushed the stout walking-stick I always carried with me into the water, to sound its depths. I could not touch the bottom, and I shuddered as I reflected that it was deep enough to end the woes of any rash and despairing mortal. One plunge upon such a night as this, and the wretched life was over. Did the quiet surface upon which I gazed hide a tragedy so awful? Common enough in human records was such an ending of folly and sinful temptation.

Before I had determined on my course my attention was attracted by a red glow in mid air at the other end of the bridge. A man was there, walking towards me, and the glow

came from a cigar he was smoking. As he approached me I observed that he was in evening dress, but the night was too dark for me to see his face clearly. By his springy steps I judged him to be young, and there was a noticeable freedom, not to say insolence in his movements which impressed me strongly. His appearance in evening dress, in a spot so secluded, aroused my curiosity. He was a gentleman—I am setting down the conclusions I formed as he traversed the bridge—and came from the Hall. Certainly for no idle purpose; there were pleasanter places in the park in which he could have smoked without interruption. Why, then, had he chosen these lonely woods in which to puff his cigar? I know the flavour of a good cigar, and his was an exceptionally fine one, which only a gentleman could afford to smoke. It was perhaps because I was in search of a clue that I associated this gentleman with Honoria. I was ready to catch at any straw that presented itself, and I caught at this, and determined to watch his pro-

ceedings. Whether I was right or wrong it could do no harm.

I kept myself well in shadow, and when, having crossed the bridge, he turned, without hesitation, to the left, I followed him so quietly that I was safe from detection. It is generally easy to tell whether a man is walking aimlessly or with a distant goal in view; the manner of the gentleman I was following indicated the latter, and the result proved it to be so. We had gone about five hundred yards, when he paused before a rough bench which had been set up in the forest. Upon this bench sat a woman, who raised her head at his approach. Otherwise she did not move or speak till he addressed her. The woman was Honoria.

They gazed at each other in silence a while; a frightened, piteous expression on her face—a scornful, pitiless expression on his.

"Well," he said, "you are here."

"Yes."

"Been waiting long?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Now perhaps you will tell me what the devil brought you back to the village?"

"You know."

"I don't know. Come, out with it! You will do yourself no good by prevaricating."

"I wanted to see you."

"In the name of all that's wonderful, what for?"

"You know."

"I don't know."

"You do." In maintaining her point she exhibited no defiance. It was a simple and helpless iteration of the truth.

"All right; I do know. Good-night."

"Austin!"

"Well?"

But Honoria, whether from weakness of character or sheer despair, did not answer him. She was thoroughly cowed and beaten down, and all she could do was to silently clasp her hands and with mournful eyes

appeal to him for mercy. He had turned to leave her, but he thought better of it, and now once more he confronted her.

"How did you ascertain I was here?"

"I guessed you would be. Last year, before I——" She paused.

"Go on. Before you——"

"Went away, there was a talk of a celebration of this birthday. I came upon the chance."

"A devilish unlucky chance. You had better have remained where you were."

"I could not."

"Why?"

"I was turned out of my lodgings. I had no money to pay the rent."

"A likely story. How did you get here?"

"I walked."

"All the way?"

"All the way."

"You must have enjoyed yourself."

He was so utterly heartless that I could have struck him; but to carry out Miss Haldane's merciful intention it was imperative

I should keep myself from the observation of this gentleman.

"Give me your attention," he said presently. "You ought to know me pretty well by this time, and if you think you can turn me from any purpose I have formed you will find out your mistake. I told you in London that I was tired of you, and intended to have nothing more to do with you. You don't dispute that, I suppose?"

"I don't dispute it. You told me; but what am I to do?"

"I don't care what you do. The world is before you."

"Austin," she said, with some poor show of spirit, "when you took me from the village——"

"Be careful in what you say. It was your own choice."

"God help me, it was! But I believed in your promises."

"More fool you! I should have been as great a fool as yourself if I had believed in your protestations. We were both playing

our own game. You wanted to go to London. I took you there, and a pretty penny you cost me."

"You promised to marry me."

"O, yes, the usual cry!"

"You promised solemnly, and I believed you. How should I have guessed you were deceiving me?"

"Don't ask me conundrums. I made no promise to you that I have not fulfilled. As for marrying, you must be mad. You have no claim upon me, and I will take precious good care that you do not annoy me. There's the law, my lady; if you don't mind you will get into its clutches."

"What have I done to deserve it?"

"What have you done? Why the whole village is ringing with it. If I had suspected you were a thief——"

"Austin," she cried, interrupting him, "you don't, you can't believe it!"

"I do believe it, and so does every one. Let us put this thing straight, my girl. You ran away from the village—don't interrupt

me again, please. You are not the only young woman who has run away from a village, and you won't be the last. On the night you disappeared the woman you were living with was robbed of some articles of jewellery. You are liable at any moment to be taken up on that charge and clapped into prison. I don't want to move in the matter unless you force me to it."

"All you want," said Honoria, "is to get rid of me."

"Exactly. The little comedy in which you and I played the principal parts is finished. It wasn't by any means an original comedy; the world knows it by heart. The curtain fell and I bade you good-bye, and left you twenty pounds to start afresh with. If you didn't make good use of the money, that is your business, not mine, and I don't intend to make it mine. I'm not a sponge."

"I made the money last as well as I could; and you know, Austin, I wrote to you more than once."

"Did you?" But although this exclama-

tion implied denial I saw that he had received the letters.

"I did, and asked you what I was to do, but you never replied. Austin, don't drive me to despair. You don't know what is before me—something that makes me tremble to think of. It would be better for me to be dead than to live through what is coming unless you keep the promise you made me."

"Is that all you have to say?" he asked, flicking the ash off his cigar.

"What more can I say, Austin?"

"I can't suggest. You have already said too much."

"There is one thing I could do if you abandon me."

"What is it?"

"Expose you."

He laughed. "Who would believe you? Who would take the word of a thief and a wanton against that of a gentleman? There have been plenty of these trumped-up charges; look them up, and see who has

come off best. You would but expose your own shame, my lady. Now, just look here. Dare to threaten me again, and I'll set the police on you. Be reasonable, and I'll help you on a bit, as I would help a stranger. Here's a sovereign; you can get back to London with it: and then, never let me hear of you again. You can't say now that I'm hard on you."

He held out a sovereign to her, but she did not take it.

"Is that all you will do?" she asked.

"Oh!" he said, "do you want more?"

"It is not money I mean."

"I can't think of anything else. Will you be sensible, and take a couple of sovereigns?"

"No."

"Then I have nothing more to say. Good-night."

He turned on his heel, and walked leisurely away, giving her time to call him back. But she spoke no word, and presently he was out of sight and hearing.

My whole attention was now centred upon Honoria. I felt that if I suddenly presented myself I should frustrate the object I had in view. Honoria would know that I had been eavesdropping, and that the true story of her shame was no longer a secret. The chances were, in her state of mind, that she would repulse me and fly from me ; and even if I succeeded in detaining her she would look upon me with suspicion, and regard me as an enemy instead as a friend. My purpose was to win her confidence, and this would scarcely be possible if I showed that I was fully acquainted with her sad position. Therefore, I determined to wait patiently until she removed from the spot, and afforded me a more favourable opportunity of introducing myself.

For quite a quarter of an hour she did not move from her seat. I was prepared for an exhibition of grief and despair, but not a sound escaped her. She sat perfectly still, with her hands clasped before her, her manner that of one whose mind was a blank.

Some light sound from bird or animal aroused her. With a frightened look, her nerves being in the condition to construe threateningly any indication of life that reached her senses, she rose to her feet, and, as though she had been ordered from the spot by a voice of authority, moved away. In which direction? That of the rustic bridge which spanned the lake. From the park there was a road to the railway station, from which a train for London would leave at twelve o'clock. I looked at my watch; it was a quarter to eleven. There was plenty of time for Honoria to get to the station in time to catch this last train. Perhaps that was her intention, her errand to Chudleigh having failed. Then I thought that Miss Haldane had told me Honoria was penniless, but, after all, it might not be the case. Doubtless she had money enough to take her to London, and if she had not, I could supply her with more than was needful. I pitied the girl sincerely, and heartily despised her betrayer, but I had not made up my mind as to her character.

I followed her noiselessly to the lake, determined to wait till she was near the station before I accosted her.

At the lake she paused in thought for so long a time that I began to get anxious. Once she turned her head hurriedly in my direction, and it was only by a rapid and silent movement that I escaped being seen by her. Then she walked slowly on to the bridge, and when she reached the centre, paused again and looked over into the lake. It was at this point that the water was deepest. There was now a light in the sky, and I saw distinctly every movement she made. Sitting down upon the floor of the wooden bridge she took from her pocket an envelope, and from that a sheet of notepaper, upon which she wrote some words. Replacing the sheet of paper in the envelope she returned it to her pocket, and then, with a sudden and quick motion she stood upright. The decision and rapidity of this movement inspired me with the fear that she was about to commit suicide. This indeed was her intention. Flinging up her

arms she stood for a moment in suspense, with the light shining upon her ; but before she could carry her desperate purpose into execution she was struggling in my arms.

CHAPTER VII.

OFF TO LONDON.

"LET me go, let me go!" she cried.

"In a moment," I said soothingly; "we must get off this bridge first; it is unsafe."

Beset by fears, surrounded by enemies, she must have put the worst construction upon my unexpected appearance. I did all I could by kind and assuring words to set her mind at ease with respect to me, and when we were at a safe distance from the lake I said:

"That rickety old bridge needs repairing. No wonder you felt dizzy as you were crossing it. I almost tumbled into the water myself. You are all right now are you not?"

Instead of answering my question she asked me another. "Where are you going to take me?"

"Nowhere," I replied with a smile, "except

you wish me to show you the way to any place. Though, for the matter of that, I don't promise to be of much use, as I am a stranger in the village."

"Don't you know me? Have you never seen me before?"

I answered without the least hesitation or compunction, "No, I don't know you, I have never seen you before." A sigh of relief escaped her. "But now I look at you," I continued, "I shouldn't wonder if you are the girl I'm searching for." Again the expression on her face was one of fear, as that of a person who was being hunted down. "Now, my dear—don't mind my calling you my dear; it's only in a fatherly way, and I want to be your friend if you'll let me—don't get wrong thoughts into your head. All I know about you, supposing you to be the person I'm looking for, is what Miss Haldane has told me, and it isn't likely that she would say anything about you that wasn't kind and good."

"Miss Haldane?"

"Yes, my dear, Miss Haldane, as sweet a young lady as ever drew breath. I happened to come down to-night upon a little matter of business, and Miss Haldane happening to see me, asked me to do her a service. It's the first time I've been in Chudleigh, and everybody and everything, except Miss Haldane, is new to me, and that perhaps is why she pressed me into her service. Of course I don't know it was her reason; I'm only making a guess at it. There's a grand ball at the Manor House to-night, you know, and I'm not one of the guests, not being a gentleman. 'Mr. Millington'— that is my name— 'Mr. Millington,' Miss Haldane says to me, 'there's a young friend of mine to whom I am afraid the servants in the Hall have behaved unkindly. She is very sensitive, and has gone away, when I wanted her to remain. I wish you would go and find her, and do what you can to help her, and give her my love.'"

"She said that?"

"She said that, my dear. 'And give her my love, and say that I am her friend, and

shall always be her friend. She hasn't many, poor girl.' Then she gave me a description of you, and told me your name was Honoria."

"You are not deceiving me?"

"Look me in the face, and say whether it's likely I would deceive a girl who might be my daughter, and base and mean enough to invent a story to lead her astray?"

"No," said Honoria, casting a timid glance at me, "you don't look like one of that sort."

"I'm not one of that sort. If I were, Miss Haldane would not put trust in me. Then she says to me, 'Perhaps Honoria is in want of money,' and she empties her purse into my hand. 'Give her this, and ask her to come to me, or let me come to her, and if she will not, tell her to write to me.'" I took Honoria's hand in mine, and put into it the gold and silver which Miss Haldane had entrusted me with. She looked at the money with eyes in which tears were rising. I hailed this softened mood with satisfaction; it was the best of signs. "'And mind,' says Miss Haldane, 'you're not to

leave Honoria till you see her comfortably provided for.' Then, having to dress for the ball, she sent me away to find you, and I don't for a moment doubt, if her duties had not kept her at the Hall, that she would have come out with me to look for you. Well, my dear, it was rather a wild-goose chase I was engaged in, and I hardly knew which way to look. You weren't in the park, so far as I could see, and I went to the woods, and had given you up, for I saw no trace of you, and was coming back over the bridge when I caught sight of a figure crossing that rickety structure. I suppose you were alarmed, for you struggled to get away from me, and now, my dear, you know all it is in my power to tell you. I hope you believe me?"

"Yes," said Horonia, "I believe you."

And now she burst into a passion of tears. To strengthen her confidence in me, I turned my head, and waited till her passion was spent. Then I said:

"The question is, What are we to do? I have only partly executed Miss Haldane's

commission. She won't be satisfied unless I finish it. I've got to look after you, you know."

"I must ask you something first," said Honoria.

"I'll answer anything you put to me."

"You searched the woods for me, and didn't find me."

"No, I did not find you, and I was greatly disappointed."

"Did you see anyone there?"

"Not a soul. The place was as quiet and lonely as a churchyard. I don't mind confessing I was glad to get out of it."

She wiped her eyes, and looked at me attentively.

"Well," I said with a smile, "do you think you can trust me?"

"I must trust you," she replied, "there is no one else."

"You must have shelter for the night. Shall we go to the village?"

"No," she said, shuddering; "not there, not there!"

"Perhaps you would like to get back to London?"

"Can I? It is so late!"

"I have a time-table in my pocket." I consulted it. As I have said, there was a last night train for London, and there was, moreover, an early morning train from the city, which would enable me to get back to Chudleigh Park in time for my appointment with Mr. Haldane. I told Honoria of the late train.

"I will take it," she said.

"And I will go with you," I said.

"There is no occasion. I can go alone."

"My dear," I said, "you will allow me, as a father, to know what is best. I would not let a daughter of my own travel alone so late as this, and I shall not let you. Besides, I promised Miss Haldane to see you in safe shelter to-night, and I shall carry out her wishes."

She yielded without remonstrance, and we stepped on towards the station. It suited her humour and mine that our way lay through

a bye-road, where we were not likely to meet with any of the villagers, but we had first to traverse a path from which I saw the lights in the Manor House shining. We had a few minutes to spare, and I asked Honoria whether she would mind waiting for me alone while I ran to the Hall, my reason—with which I made her acquainted—being to endeavour to communicate to Miss Haldane the news of Honoria's safety.

"It will relieve Miss Haldane's mind," I said. "She is very anxious about you, and the knowledge that I am taking care of you will contribute to her enjoyment to-night."

"Yes, go," said Honoria.

"You will not run away?" I said.

"I promise," she answered.

"Shall I give any message to Miss Haldane from you?"

"Say that I am humbly grateful," replied Honoria, and added, after a struggle with herself, "and that I am unworthy of her kindness."

"That, indeed, I shall not say," I remarked,

and, leaving her in a secluded spot, I hastened to the Hall.

Good fortune befriended me; I saw Rachel, and she stepped aside with me.

"Tell Miss Haldane," I said, "that I have found Honoria, and am going to London with her."

"It will make her happy to hear it," said Rachel; "she has been worrying about her. But, oh, Mr. Millington, what a trouble for you!"

"Not at all, my dear," I said. "I would do much more than this to serve so sweet a lady."

"Mr. Millington," said Rachel, "I am so glad that you are what you are. George was right."

"He is not wrong about many things, my dear," I said.

"Not about me?" she asked, with a pretty archness.

"Not at all about you, my dear," I said, and I kissed the good girl, there being no one to see us. "I shall be back in Chudleigh to-morrow. Any word for George?"

"My love, Mr. Millington."

"I will give it him, Rachel."

"My dear love," she said.

"Yes, Rachel. Good-night, my dear."

"Good-night, Mr. Millington."

I sped back to Honoria, with some slight misgivings as to whether I should find her; but she was faithful to her promise, and we arrived at the station before the train was there. Honoria kept herself out of view of the station-master, and I succeeded in putting her in a third-class carriage without her being observed by any one who knew her. There were very few travellers by the train, and we had a compartment to ourselves. It was during an endeavour to open a conversation with the poor girl that I noticed signs of exhaustion in her.

"You are faint," I said.

"I am hungry."

"How careless of me not to have thought of it," I said, but I had no time to say more, for Honoria's eyes closed, and she sank back in a swoon.

I could do nothing to relieve her, not being provided with food or drink. As she lay before me I could not help seeing how beautiful she was. Her features were faultless, and her dark hair and eyebrows, in contrast with her pallid face, added to her loveliness. A dangerous gift for a poor girl without parents or protector. My thoughts wandered to the man she called by the name of Austin, who was clearly her betrayer. I did not need to be told the story of the betrayal and the desertion; it was not as he had said, a comedy, but he was right when he said that the world knew it by heart. Then I thought of Miss Haldane. She had no suspicion of Honoria's shame; when she became acquainted with it, as one day she must, how would she act? What a shock it would be to her pure heart to learn that Honoria had fallen so low! And for Honoria herself, what would be the end? Too well did I divine the meaning of the words she had spoken to her betrayer: "You don't know what is before me—something that

makes me tremble to think of. It would be better for me to be dead than to live through what is coming unless you keep the promise you made me." Was this man, Austin, a friend of the Haldanes? The assignation in Chudleigh Woods with Honoria strengthened the presumption that he was no stranger to the locality, and therefore no stranger at the Manor House. Was he trusted by Miss Haldane? Had he succeeded in concealing his true character from her? In these reflections I saw all the materials for a pregnant drama of human life, although only one of its incidents had been, by accident, revealed to me.

My business, however, was not with the future, but the present. The poor insensible girl needed practical assistance, and while the train was speeding on I could not render it to her. Luckily we stopped at a station; unluckily there was no refreshment bar there. But I made a friend of the guard. For a consideration he supplied me with a slice of bread and butter, part of his night's meal,

and water in a lemonade bottle. I moistened Honoria's lips with the water, and bathed her forehead with it. She opened her eyes.

"Drink," I said, "and eat this slice of bread. When we get to London you shall have something better."

She thanked me gratefully, and I managed to sustain her spirits till we arrived at our destination. I hailed a cab, and informing the driver of our needs, he took us to a coffee house, where a cup of hot coffee and some bread and meat put colour into Honoria's cheeks. I, also, being rather used up, was thankful for the refreshment.

"Where to?" asked the driver.

Strangely, I had not thought of a place, and I asked Honoria whether there were any lodgings to which I could take her. No, she answered, she did not know of any. She had had rooms in a house, but had been turned out of them, and she would not return. It was now between three and four o'clock in the morning, and as I was standing in perplexity, Honoria said :

"Leave me here; I can manage for myself."

"No," I said, "that is impossible. To leave you alone in London streets at such an hour——"

There was nothing for it but to take her to my house, and I gave the driver the address. I told Honoria what I had determined upon.

"There is only my son and a maid at home," I said, "but you can rest on the sofa till morning, when you will be able to get a place that will suit you."

She looked at me, in wonder I thought, and we drove to Shepherd's Bush, where I dismissed the cab, and rang and knocked at my street door. I could not help smiling to myself as I thought of George's amazement when he saw me at such a time of night in the company of a young girl.

"Who's there?" George called out presently, from the passage.

"Open the door, old man," I cried.

"Why, dad!" exclaimed George, and the

door was hastily thrown open. As I expected, George, who was in his trousers, without coat or waistcoat, fell back at sight of Honoria.

"Light the gas in the sitting-room, George," I said. "Hurry up, old man."

He obeyed me in silence, and I conducted Honoria to the room, where she stood with her hand resting on the table.

"This a friend of Miss Haldane's," I said to him, "at whose request I have brought to London. It would not have been proper for her to travel alone in the middle of the night. All the houses and hotels are closed, so I brought her home here, where she will stay till morning."

"Quite right, dad." But George was obviously puzzled.

"You can have my bedroom if you like," I said, turning to Honoria. "You must be dreadfully tired."

"I am ashamed to put you to so much trouble," she answered. "I will rest on the sofa if you will allow me."

"Very well. Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you. There are few men in the world who would have done so much."

Her lips trembled, and I made a motion to George to leave the room.

"Will you shake hands with me?" asked Honoria.

"Indeed I will."

But to my surprise, when I held out my hand, she would not take it, and the thought crossed my mind that she had asked me to try me, and to be sure whether I was acquainted with her shame—in which case, she probably argued, I should have refused.

"If you can trust me," she said, "will you leave me alone here?"

"Of course I can trust you," I said heartily. "Try and get an hour's sleep. I may be able to see you in the morning before I go."

With that I left her, and went straight to George.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIMPSON IS INQUISITIVE.

I PLACED him in possession of the facts, but although he was much interested in what I had to say of Honoria and Miss Haldane, he was naturally much more interested in what I had to say of Rachel Diprose. I soon satisfied him on that head, and he was immensely pleased at my approval of his pretty sweetheart.

"I have killed two birds with one stone," I said. "I have seen Rachel and like her, and I have rendered a service to Miss Haldane."

"Yes," said George, "but the bird you went down to Chudleigh to kill is yet on the wing—your business with Mr. Haldane."

"That is still to be let out of the trap," I observed. "There's a train from Euston at 7.40, and I must catch it. I can have a

couple of hours' sleep if you'll undertake to call me."

"I'll do that, dad."

"The girl must be dead tired, George, and if she falls asleep won't wake up too readily. How does your work stand? Can you be spared till dinner time?"

"Yes."

"You had better remain in the house then, and be ready to assist her in any way she requires. Don't let her go away without breakfast. When people are in trouble they appreciate any little mark of attention. If I don't see her myself before I leave give her a note that I may as well write at once; I may not have time when I wake up."

I wrote the note there and then:

"Dear Miss Honoria,—

"My son George will assist you in any way you wish. I am called away on business which cannot be postponed. You can trust my son thoroughly. If you prefer

to consult me instead of him I shall be back to-morrow or the next day, and shall be glad to advise you. A line here will always reach me, and I will attend to it without delay. Hoping you are feeling strong and well,

"I am faithfully yours,

"R. MILLINGTON."

Addressing the envelope simply "Miss Honoria," I handed the note to George, and went to my room. The moment I threw myself on my bed I was asleep.

Short as was my rest, it did me good. I jumped up when George called me, gave myself a wash in cold water, peeped into the garden, and was ready to start.

"You have ten minutes yet, dad," said George, "and breakfast is ready for you."

There it was on the table, bread and butter cut, a pot of steaming tea, and a couple of rashers of bacon frizzling on a hot plate. And there, too, was a cab waiting at the door to take me to Euston.

"Seen nothing of Honoria, I suppose?" I said, as I ate the welcome meal.

"Nothing," said George. "There hasn't been a sound in the room."

"Don't forget my note, George."

"All right, dad."

Before I left the house I lingered a moment at Honoria's door. All was quiet within. I stepped softly away, and said to George as I got into the cab:

"I shall stop at Chudleigh Park to-night, at 'the Brindled Cow.' If you have anything particular to say you can wire me there, and anyhow you had better write this afternoon, so that I may receive your letter by first post to-morrow morning."

We shook hands and I was soon speeding to Chudleigh Park, where I arrived at eleven o'clock. The landlord of "the Brindled Cow" looked rather curiously at me, I thought, and I immediately jumped at the cause. I had engaged a bed in his house last night and had not occupied it. I was considering whether I should tell him frankly I

had been to London, or whether, for Honoria's sake, I should tell some other tale, when he said :

" Mr. Simpson has been quite anxious about you. He was here up to twelve o'clock last night, and has been twice this morning to ask after you."

" It is very kind of him. You told him I did not sleep here ? "

" Oh, yes ; and he said it looked rather strange."

" Well, so it does," said I, my mind made up not to beat about the bush, " but the fact is, some business I had forgotten called me suddenly to London."

" What train did you take, sir ? "

" The last."

" You must have got to London before morning ? "

" I did. It did not matter, my home being there."

" Certainly. Will you want your room to-night ? "

" Yes, and I shall dine here at about five."

"Alone?"

"I can't exactly say."

"Very well; there'll be enough for two."

Both he and I were thinking of Simpson with respect to my second dinner at "The Brindled Cow"—he, doubtless with a desire to increase the bill, I with half an idea that Simpson might endeavour to fasten himself on to me again. I ran up to my room to wash and brush before going to my appointment with Mr. Haldane, and then proceeded in the direction of the Manor House. I was not half way there when, who should I see walking towards me but Simpson, the irrepressible?

"Why, here you are again," he said, speaking as if I was a clown in a pantomime. "I am glad to see you, that I am."

This excess of cordiality did not evoke any sympathetic response. I nodded, and said curtly I was glad because he was glad.

"When did you get back?" he inquired.

"Back from where?"

"From London."

"How do you know I have been there?" I asked blandly.

"How do I know? Do you think anyone can take a ticket for London at our little local station without its being known?"

"You inquired there?"

"I was that anxious about you," said Simpson, "that I inquired everywhere.

"I am much indebted to you."

"Oh, it was only friendly. You would have done as much for me."

"I am not so sure."

"Oh, yes, you would, Millington. Every man and woman in the world has got the hall-mark, a note of interrogation; some large, some small."

"Yours is a large one, evidently."

"I don't deny it. Not in persons I don't care for, mind; but when a man collars me as you collared me with your free ways—after my own heart, Millington—I'm always anxious about him."

"If you're collared by many people," I remarked, "you must have enough to do."

"Ah, but I'm not. You are a stranger in the village, remember. Anything might have happened to you. You might have been waylaid, and robbed, and murdered. I'll show you a place in Chudleigh Woods where a man was murdered some years ago, and to this day it remains a mystery. I thought of that last night. I said to myself, 'Simpson, you are responsible; you should have looked after him better; you will never forgive yourself, Simpson, if anything has happened to Millington.' So what did I do? I went to Chudleigh Woods, with a pistol in my pocket, to look for you."

"A likely place for a stranger to go to on a dark night?" I said. "Did you think of that?"

"I only thought of your safety, Millington. If I'd been satisfied of that I should have laid my head on my pillow with a contented mind. I didn't find you in the woods. There was the bridge over the lake leading to 'em. You might have fallen in, and there would have been an end of you. I was positively

uncomfortable. I didn't get to bed till two o'clock. And you"—with his eyes on my face—"look as if you'd had a bad night."

"It stands to reason that with such a journey I couldn't have much sleep."

"Of course it does."

"Your mind's relieved now, I hope?"

"It is. I say, Millington"—and he poked his fingers in my ribs, and laughed—"you're a gay dog, you are! We're not in it with you. Skim milk for us, cream for you. You do pick up the tit bits, you do!"

"Out with the mystery," I said.

"That's where it is," said Simpson; "it is a mystery. 'Who was she?' I said to the railway porter. 'Didn't see her face,' said he, 'and she didn't want me to. Carriage all to themselves.' Oh, you're a sly one, Millington!" He gave me a series of winks, and laughed heartily.

There was no misunderstanding his allusions. He had discovered that I had a female companion with me last night. Did he suspect that that companion was Honoria?

I made a dash at mystification.

"Suppose I brought her down with me yesterday to see the gay doings in the village?"

This rather staggered him—for a moment only, however.

"It won't do, Millington, it won't do. What, bring a lady all the way from bright London to see a tuppenny-ha'penny show like ours! A likely thing! And is it likely, either, that you would have left her to ramble about by herself all day, and have given me, a stranger, so much of your pleasant society? Try another, my boy, try another."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. There's no putting you off the scent, I can see that. But you must understand that there are some things a gentleman would rather not speak about."

"A wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse," said Simpson. "Let's have a word on another subject—that girl Honoria. What are you looking at your watch for?"

"What does a man generally look at his watch for?" I retorted.

"To see the time," replied Simpson calmly, which made me rather ashamed of myself for showing temper. When you get hot and the other man keeps cool, you give him an advantage over you. "Have you got an appointment?"

"I must be at the Hall by twelve o'clock."

"To see Mr. Haldane. I wish you joy. I caught a glimpse of him half an hour ago and he looked as black as thunder. It wants a quarter of an hour of twelve yet, and it won't take you five minutes to get to the Hall. This is a fine park, isn't it? Wish it was mine without any mortgages on it. Mortgages are the very devil. A man may be the master of a great estate, and it may be no better than a white elephant. I was speaking of that Honoria. What do you think? Since Miss Haldane took her to the Hall last night, nothing's been heard of her."

"Indeed."

"Where can she have got to? I've hunted

high and low for her, but it was like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. Singular, isn't it? But I see you want to get rid of me. You've got Mr. Haldane on the brain. Hope to meet you by-and-bye. Take care of yourself."

"I'll try to."

I asked myself as he walked away, whistling a lively air, whether the interest he exhibited in my movements proceeded from mere idle motives or from a deeper cause, and I could not answer the question. To account for a direct motive required a more comprehensive knowledge of Simpson than I at present possessed.

Rachel Diprose was looking out for me, and ran to me smiling, before I reached the Hall door.

"I am so glad you have got back safe," she said. "What a tiring journey you must have had!"

"It was rather so, Rachel," I replied, "but I am not an old man yet. George comes of a good stock. You've had a late night of it, too, I expect."

"Yes; the ball wasn't over till four o'clock, and Miss Haldane stopped to the last. Do I look tired?"

"You look as fresh as a daisy, my dear. I gave your love to George, and he sent his to you. I astonished him by making my appearance so unexpectedly, and at such an hour in the morning, or rather night. I suppose Miss Haldane is not up yet."

"O, yes, she is, and that is one reason why I wanted to speak to you at once."

"To hear about Honoria," I said. "Well, tell Miss Haldane that we got to London all right, and that I took her to my house. When I left this morning she was asleep, and when she wakes George will look after her. I wrote a line to Honoria, saying I would be back to-morrow, and that I would be ready to help her in any way she desired. The poor girl is very unhappy, and very grateful to Miss Haldane."

"So she ought to be, but I don't want George to have much to do with her."

This remark made me suspect that Rachel

did not regard Honoria in the same light as her young mistress. The tittle-tattle of the servants and the village people had reached her ears, and had produced its natural effect upon her mind. I did not think any the worse of Rachel for that. When boys and girls become men and women it is as well that they should be in a position to understand things. Keeping young people in ignorance of natural laws is productive of no end of mischief.

"Don't you be troubled about George, my dear," I said, pinching her cheek. "He is a good lad, and there is only one little woman in the world for him. Now I must go and see Mr. Haldane, who wants to speak to me about something or other. I shall stay at 'the Brindled Cow' to-night, and shall return to London to morrow morning by the 11.30 train."

The clock struck twelve as I sent my card up to Mr. Haldane. In matters of business I have always been a punctual man.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. HALDANE EXPLAINS HIMSELF.

Mr. Haldane was in his library, a noble room, lined with book shelves. He looked at his watch as I entered, said "Good-morning," and pointed to a chair at the table by which he was sitting.

"I sent for you, Mr. Millington," he said, plunging into business at once, "because I believe you are a man to be trusted. I require such a man to undertake a certain private matter, for which I am prepared to pay liberally. I gather from your reply to my letter and your presence here that you are willing to undertake the business."

In case I wished to retreat this was cutting the ground from under my feet, but I recognised that Mr. Haldane had put the natural construction upon my response to his request,

and that I was to some extent compromised. Still I said:

"May I know first, sir, what the business is?"

"No," he replied, and I saw that he was somewhat surprised, "it cannot be disclosed to anyone who is not directly engaged in it. Did you come to see me out of simple idleness?"

"Not at all, sir; only I have retired from active work."

"The fact of your not being actively associated with any inquiry office is an additional recommendation to me. It affords a more complete assurance of absolute privacy."

I perceived from his manner that if I wished to be of service to Miss Haldane, and to be free to visit Rachel Diprose at Chudleigh Park when I desired, it was necessary for me to decide promptly. Mr. Haldane was clearly a gentleman not to be trifled with.

"I will undertake the business, sir," I said.

"You understand that what passes between us is in absolute confidence, and that implicit secrecy must be observed."

"I understand, sir; but I must make one remark. Speaking in the dark, not knowing yet the nature of the commission, it may be necessary for me to employ some person to assist me."

"It may be. In that case you will look out for a reliable person, who must not know that you are working for me. Plainly, Mr. Millington, my name is not to come into the affair."

"Then I will not mention it, sir."

"Good. Now, Mr. Millington, I want, as far as possible, nothing written upon paper concerning this—this commission; no memoranda lying about which a prying person might get hold of. The utmost caution must be observed, and the communications which pass between us must be personal. If you have occasion to write me any letters do not refer to the matter—simply say that you are coming to see me on a certain day at a

certain hour, and I shall understand that you are coming to report progress."

"It shall be done as you direct, sir." The arrangement suited me; it would give me opportunities to see Rachel and Miss Haldane.

"Your memory is good, Mr. Millington?"

"Excellent, sir."

"I have written a statement respecting the commission" — he seemed to like the word, and to be glad to use it instead of "business" — "which I propose to read to you. When you get the particulars in your mind distinctly I shall burn the paper."

"Am I at liberty, sir, to ask you any questions as you read?"

"For the purpose of perfect clearness, yes; but no questions that do not directly affect the matter."

"I shall keep as strictly to the point as I can, sir."

"Draw a little closer to the table."

While I did so he went to the door by

which I had entered, locked it, and returned to his seat. He then took a paper from a drawer in the table, and proceeded to read in a low clear voice :

"In the early part of the year 1867 a gentleman of the name of Julius Clifford took passage for New York in the steamer *Circassia*. Among the passengers on board was a young woman named Adeline Ducroz. She was in service as lady's maid to a mistress whose name it is unnecessary to mention."

I interrupted him. "I beg your pardon, sir. It may be very necessary. I speak as an expert."

An expression of annoyance appeared in his face as he said, "It may have escaped Mr. Clifford's memory."

"Then of course it cannot be stated now. But it will not be a difficult matter to obtain it from the agents of the vessel."

"If there is need for it," said Mr. Haldane. "What are you writing on that paper?"

"The names of the persons you are introducing. They are strange to me, and I must get familiar with them. I shall require some latitude with respect to names and dates, and what I write will not pass out of my possession."

"If it must be," he said, and proceeded to read from the document before him:

"Adeline Ducroz was twenty-two or twenty-three years of age and was unhappy in her situation. She confided her troubles to Mr. Clifford, who pitied and sympathized with her, and when she asked him what she was to do, he advised her to leave her mistress and get another situation upon her arrival in New York. She followed only a part of this advice. She quitted service, and instead of seeking fresh employment, threw herself upon the protection of Mr. Clifford. Believing himself to be in some degree responsible for her friendless position, he stood by her, and they lived together in New York for five months."

"As man and wife?" I asked.

"Surely the statement is sufficiently explicit," replied Mr. Haldane.

"Acting as a confidential agent," I urged, "it will be well to make things as clear as possible. They were not married in church?"

"No, they were not married in church."

"By registrar?"

"No."

"But they lived together in New York as man and wife?"

"Yes."

"Publicly?"

"Yes, I suppose we may say publicly."

"She passing by the name of Ducroz or Clifford?"

"By the name of Clifford."

"Making purchases probably as Mrs. Clifford?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Clifford paying debts which she incurred?"

"Yes."

"Paying these debts by cheque?"

"Many of them."

"I assume it would be easy to establish all these details by evidence?"

"No doubt."

"You are aware," I said, "that Mr. Clifford and Miss Ducroz, living in the State of New York in these circumstances, were legally man and wife?"

"Mr. Clifford has heard some nonsense to that effect before, but he is an Englishman, living under English institutions."

He paused, probably expecting me to contest the question; but I was not there to argue, and I was silent. Presently he turned again to the document.

"At the end of this time they came together to England, and lived in various places, and visited the Continent. Disagreements, however, started up between them, and they separated. I find," said Mr. Haldane, looking up from the document, "that this is all Mr. Clifford has written. You understand it?"

"Yes," I replied, "it is very simple."

"The paper, then, may be destroyed," said Mr. Haldane, and he put it in the fire and watched it smoulder away.

I thought the document brief enough, and its termination strangely sudden. I knew, however, that clients, as a rule, never tell the whole of the truth—only just as much as suits them, leaving you to guess the rest. It is a short-sighted policy, prompted by a common human weakness.

"What I wish you to do," said Mr. Haldane, "on behalf of Mr. Clifford, is to ascertain the precise particulars of this woman's career and destiny after the separation. Whatever funds are required to prosecute the inquiry will be supplied by me, and I will give you now a cheque in advance."

It was already written, and he detached it from his cheque book, and pushed it towards me. The amount was £200, "payable to bearer," and the cheque was not crossed. I thought the introduction of the word "destiny" in Mr. Haldane's last speech some-

what peculiar, and I asked for an explanation of it.

"Mr. Clifford believed," said Mr. Haldane, "that the woman died shortly after the separation."

"Has he any reason now to believe that she is not dead?"

"A rumour has reached him, and that is why he desires the matter to be thoroughly sifted."

"Is it only now that the rumour has reached him?"

"There was an attempt," replied Mr. Haldane, "some years ago to blackmail him in connection with this feature in the affair."

"Did he resist it?"

"He did not; he submitted to it."

He did not furnish me with any particulars of this successful attempt to blackmail, and I did not ask him for them. The impression he produced upon me in the disclosures he had made was that he had presented me with a very imperfect skeleton of an important secret, and was purposely concealing from

me much that would have naturally aided me in the task I had undertaken. However, that was his affair; his conduct was foolish, but if anybody suffered it would be himself. There was one question, however, the answer to which would give me some sort of a starting point for my investigations.

"In what part of England," I asked, "did Mr. Clifford and Miss Ducroz separate?"

"In no part of England. They were in Paris at the time."

"Did they remain in Paris after the separation?"

"Mr. Clifford left for England immediately."

"And Miss Ducroz?"

"Remained, I believe, in Paris."

"I should like to know the name of the hotel they stopped at before the final disagreement."

"I will endeavour to obtain it, and will send it on to London to you."

After a few more words between us I wished Mr. Haldane good morning, and rose

to go. Forgetting that the door was locked I tried the handle, and was aware that at the same moment some person was trying it from the outside.

"Turn the key," said Mr. Haldane.

I did so, and as I opened the door a gentleman entered the room with the observation:

"You're tiled in precious close, Haldane."

I started at the voice. It was that of the gentleman who had met Honoria in Chudleigh Woods last night. He gave me a sharp look, and passed me, and as I had no possible excuse for lingering, I left the room, closing the door after me.

I had matter for fresh thought now. This gentleman, whom Honoria called Austin, was a privileged visitor at the Hall; his manner was that of one who was very much at home there. His unceremonious entrance into Mr. Haldane's room proclaimed this, and there was a freedom in his bearing which could only be accounted for on the assumption that he and his host were on the most intimate

and familiar terms. But I was not quite satisfied with this assumption; there seemed to me to be something more in their relations to each other—as indicated in the few words I heard Honoria's betrayer utter—something unrevealed. I was ready to place the worst construction on everything in connection with this gentleman; the light in which he had presented himself in his interview with Honoria proved him to be heartless, ruthless, and cynical, and it was not likely that I should regard him with any favour. Especially disagreeable was the reflection that, being on such familiar terms with Mr. Haldane, he might be equally so with Rachel's young mistress. I had come to Chudleigh Park for something. Yesterday morning I was a free man, with scarcely a care, and in the full enjoyment of as many moderate pleasures as a reasonable being could wish for, and here was I now plunged into the heart of two mysteries, which were taking strong hold upon me.

As I walked slowly through the park to

the village, I heard hasty steps behind me. Turning, I saw Rachel endeavouring to overtake me, and I waited for her to come up. The sight of her bright, eager face was quite a relief.

"As you are going away to morrow morning," she said, "I want to see as much as I can of you."

"The want is mutual, my dear," I said; "if you are bound for the village we will walk together."

She was bound for the village, and we walked side by side, drawing each other out in honest fashion, I with a desire to learn what kind of daughter-in-law she would be to me, she with a desire to learn what kind of a father-in-law I would be to her. Our conversation ran chiefly upon George, and if ever a man's ears burnt, his must have been in a blaze. It was George this, George that, and George the other, as if he were in himself the sun, moon and stars. It was a theme upon which we perfectly agreed, and we should have continued speaking of it till we

parted, had it not suddenly occurred to me that Rachel could give me some information of the gentleman I was thinking of when she joined me. So I turned the conversation upon the guests at the Hall, and the intimate friends of the Haldane family. She went over the names of the gentlemen, but there was no Austin among them. Then, at my prompting, she gave me a description of their personal appearance till she came to one that answered to the person I was curious about. She described him to the life, and even mimicked his voice and gestures so cleverly that I looked at her in admiration.

"What is the name of this gentleman?" I asked.

"Mr. Redwood."

"Do you know his Christian name, Rachel?"

"Louis," she replied.

CHAPTER X.

HONORIA DISAPPEARS.

Louis Redwood. If that was the man, and that his true name, he had been doubly treacherous to Honoria. That it was his true name I did not doubt, for it was scarcely likely that an intimate friend of the Haldanes would, or could successfully, masquerade in his visits to their home ; whereas, to deceive a girl as simple and credulous as Honoria was as easy as putting on a glove. My experiences in the office of Barlow and Co. had taught me not to rush too hastily at conclusions, and had, moreover, furnished me with at least half-a-dozen instances of personal resemblance which had led to more or less remarkable complications. I proceeded, therefore, to probe this particular matter more closely. Repeating the names of the guests at the Hall, as they

had been mentioned to me by Rachel, I purposely introduced the name of Austin. Rachel interrupted me.

"No," she said; "there is no one there of that name."

"I was thinking of another person," I said, and I finished the list correctly. "Mr. Redwood appears to be a privileged visitor. He must be on very intimate terms at the Hall."

"He is," said Rachel.

"And is, I suppose, a favourite there."

"Not with everybody. He and Mr. Haldane are together a great deal. I am not in love with him myself."

"How about Miss Haldane?"

"Oh, no, not at all," said Rachel, in a decided tone. "Mr. Millington, I'll tell you something if you'll keep it to yourself."

"You may depend I'll keep it to myself, my dear."

"Well, Mr. Redwood pays Miss Haldane a great deal of attention; he rides out with her, he takes her in to dinner, and he sent to London for the most beautiful bouquet you

ever saw for the ball last night. I can't say whether Miss Haldane sees it as I do, but if ever a gentleman showed he was in love, Mr. Redwood is showing it to her."

"She confides in you, Rachel?"

"Yes, Mr. Millington, she does, but she doesn't tell me everything. The worst of it is Mr. Haldane is on Mr. Redwood's side."

"Perhaps," I hazarded, "it is by her father's persuasion that your young mistress accepts Mr. Redwood's attentions."

"That's exactly it," said Rachel.

"Mr. Redwood is rich, I suppose."

"They say there is no end to his money. He lives in London, and gives grand parties and keeps race horses."

"Ah, a fashionable swell." I was familiar with the names of the gentlemen celebrated in the racing world, and I ran them over in my mind without meeting with Mr. Redwood's. That was of no account, however, as he probably raced, like many others, under an assumed name. "You have forgotten to tell me something, Rachel."

"I don't think so, Mr. Millington."

"Think a little," I said with a smile. "We are talking about Miss Haldane, you know. Now, she is a very beautiful, sweet, and charming young lady. No wonder that Mr. Redwood is in love with her. Why, there must be scores of others."

"I don't say he is the only one."

"It isn't in nature he should be—it isn't in nature he shouldn't have a rival." Rachel coloured up, and moved her head rather nervously this way and that. "Don't run away with the idea that I am poking my nose into secrets out of mere curiosity. It strikes me there's a pot on the fire with mischief in it, and with trouble in it as well, and who knows whether I mayn't be able to keep it from boiling over? Trust me, Rachel, and just whisper whether Miss Haldane isn't in love with some one."

"I will trust you, Mr. Millington, but it musn't go any further. She is."

"I thought as much. Where is he?"

"Thousands and thousands of miles away."

"And Mr. Redwood has the field all to himself. A young gentleman, Rachel?"

"Yes."

"Rich?"

"No. He went away to make his fortune, and then he is coming back to marry her."

"Is this a secret arrangement between them?"

"Oh, no; Mr. Haldane knows all about it."

"How long has the young gentleman been gone?"

"Over a year."

"And when is he expected back?"

"There's no saying. He hasn't been very fortunate up to now."

"Meanwhile he and Miss Haldane correspond?"

"Of course they do."

And meanwhile, I thought, Mr. Haldane is exerting himself to bring about a match between his daughter and Mr. Louis Redwood. In my opinion it was altogether a bad business. The union of the young girl with the plausible, treacherous man of the world could

result in nothing but unhappiness to her. It was no business of mine, but I could not help wishing I could do something to save Miss Haldane from the pit that was being dug for her. It lay in my power, certainly, to disclose Honoria's story to her, which would show the utter baseness of the man who was striving to win her affections, but would it be right for me to reveal a secret which by accident had come to my knowledge? It was not as if I were one of the family; I was an entire stranger to all concerned in this unfortunate tangle of circumstances; and if I did anything at all, the utmost caution must be observed. My cogitations did not lead to any satisfactory result; they left me at the exact point I started from, and instead of wasting any more time upon useless speculation, I bent my mind upon the actual business which claimed my attention. When we arrived at the village Rachel left me with a promise that she would see me again before I went back to London.

"I think Miss Haldane would like to see you, too," she said.

"I shall be ready to wait on her at any moment," I replied.

There was a little commission with which Miss Haldane had entrusted me, and which I had not attended to. This was to go to Mrs. Porter and pay her for the brooch and earrings which she alleged Honoria had stolen from her. It did not take long. I found Mrs. Porter much milder-tempered than she had been on the previous evening; the night's reflections had probably shown her that it would not be exactly judicious to continue attacking Honoria's character with so powerful a champion as Miss Haldane ready to defend her. When I had explained the purport of my visit, she said:

"I'd rather not say anything more. Let bygones be bygones."

But I felt it would be best to take the sting out of a woman who could not control her temper.

"Miss Haldane insists that you shall be

paid," I said. "What value do you place upon the ornaments? Were they gold?"

This question brought a remarkably uncomfortable expression into her face, and I laughed to myself, convinced from her manner that the articles were brass, and that she knew they were.

"I bought 'em for gold," she said.

"Or gilt," I suggested.

"Or gilt," she acquiesced. "I ain't much of a judge."

Inquiring how much she had given for them, she named a sum which proved the quality of the lost treasure. Gold brooch and earrings are not to be purchased for eleven shillings. I wrote out a receipt for the money, which I insisted upon her signing.

"Now, Mrs. Porter," I said, "I will give you a little sensible advice and a little information. The jewellery was brass, what they call pinchbeck: you could not else have bought them for ten times eleven shillings. I don't blame you for telling your neighbours they were gold; it was a piece of pardonable

vanity. The tramp who stole them from you tried to pawn them, I dare say, and discovered that they were worthless. You have signed a receipt and have got the money, and if you ever say another word against Honoria you will be made to suffer for it. There's a heavy punishment for libel."

"I'll never open my lips about her," said the frightened woman. "I only wish I'd never set eyes upon her."

"From what I have heard," I said severely, "you have reason to be thankful for it. Miss Haldane paid you liberally."

And having done my best to clear Honoria's character, I left Mrs. Porter a wiser, if not a better woman.

At "The Brindled Cow" a surprise awaited me, in the shape of a telegram from George.

"The young woman has vanished. Letter to-morrow.

"GEORGE."

If this meant anything, it meant that

Honoria had taken her departure from my house without George's knowledge, and that I should receive a letter in the morning explaining matters.

I was not greatly surprised at Honoria's disappearance. From a young woman in her position, with a mind so ill-regulated, anything might be expected. There was no special reason why she should trust me. True, I had been kind to her, but so must Mr. Redwood have been during the early days of their acquaintanceship. He had deceived her, why not I? The very story I had related of Miss Haldane's anxious desire to befriend her might, in her view, have been trumped up. I might even have been an emissary employed by Mr. Redwood to further entangle her and secure her silence. All these conjectures were feasible, and I could find no fault with Honoria for entertaining them, if any such conjectures had led to her flying from my house as she had flown from the Hall. My chief concern was for Miss Haldane, who must be told of the occur-

rence, and whose kind intentions were to be frustrated.

I had ordered dinner for five o'clock, and it was now three. What should I do to beguile the intervening couple of hours? There was no Simpson handy, with whom I could play bagatelle and cross-purposes at one and the same time. Chudleigh Woods held out temptations for a ramble, and to Chudleigh Woods I went.

Wandering through its lovely mazes, I should probably have been late for dinner had I not heard approaching footsteps. Bending forward I saw coming towards me Mr. Louis Redwood and my good friend Simpson. I stepped aside, so as to be out of sight, and they passed without seeing me. I made no attempt to follow them, fearing I might be discovered, but the association of these two men seemed to be another link in the chain of circumstances in which I was now involved. Without being able to hear a word that was spoken, there were indications that Mr. Redwood was laying down the law

to his companion, who was listening with humble attention. Was Simpson, then, Mr. Redwood's creature, in his pay? I had learned from Rachel that he had been in Mr. Haldane's service many years, and although Mr. Haldane and Mr. Redwood were friends, I had observed something in the latter gentleman's manner, when he entered the library after my interview with Mr. Haldane, which seemed to denote a sense of mastership. If my impression—which I admit was formed upon a very slender foundation—were correct, there was a traitorous touch in this secret interview in Chudleigh Woods between Mr. Haldane's friend and Mr. Haldane's confidential valet. For secret interview it was. I had come to the Woods for pleasure—not so they. Simpson's smug face was serious, and Mr. Redwood's not less so. Here was I, mixed up in plots and counterplots which, to all appearance, revolved round the fate and fortunes of two young girls, Miss Haldane and Honoria. Slowly and thoughtfully I walked to the village and entered the "Brindled Cow."

CHAPTER XI.

SIMPSON PERSEVERES.

And there, at the bar, was Simpson, smooth, smug, and smiling.

"I've been looking everywhere for you," he said, "and wondering where you had gone to."

"I've been killing time," I said, "for want of something better to do."

"Mooning about," said Simpson, with a wink. "You mustn't come breaking our women's hearts with your London ways. Upon my soul, Millington, it's hardly fair."

"Get along with you," I said jocosely, entering into his humour; if he could play his game, I could play mine, "I'm the father of a family. You're only a boy compared with me."

After I had dined I found Simpson still hanging about the inn, and I proposed a walk.

"Where to?" he inquired.

"Anywhere," I answered.

"Let's go to the woods," he suggested. "I'll show you where that murder was committed."

He took me to the spot. It was a cruel murder, that of a young girl; you read of such in to-day's newspapers; and like too many deeds of this description, the monster who perpetrated it had never been caught. As Simpson pioneered me through the woods I observed that he cast covert and curious glances at me, the object of which was to discover if the place was quite new to me. Any sign of familiarity from me would have been a confession that I had met Honoria there last night. I was careful to give none, and Simpson went away no wiser than he came. Had I been a nervous man I should have had dreams on this night, but I am by constitution strong and healthy, and I enjoyed a dream-

less sleep of eight good hours, and rose early enough in the morning to be standing at the door of the "Brindled Cow" when the local postman came up with the letters. There were two, one for the landlord, and one for me, from George. It was short and to the point:

"DEAR FATHER,—

"My telegram will have told you the news. The young woman you brought home has gone. How she went and when she went I cannot say. All I know is that I waited in the house till one o'clock, when I thought it time to give her a call. I went to her door and knocked over and over again. There was no answer. 'What's wrong?' thought I, and I tried the door. It was unlocked, and going into the room, it was empty. At whatever time she went she must have crept away like a cat. I searched about, and found a paper, which I enclose. Hope to see your old face to-morrow. The house isn't the same without you in it.

Give my love to Rachel, and say I am all right.

"Your affectionate son,

"GEORGE."

The paper George referred to was an envelope, containing an enclosure. I drew it out and read:

"AUSTIN,—

"I am going to put an end to myself, and you have driven me to it. You are my murderer. You have ruined and deserted me, and I have nothing to live for. Be kinder to the next girl you bring to shame than you have been to

"HONORIA."

It was the paper which she had written on the bridge last night, before endeavouring to carry out her wretched intention. I made a memorandum of the incident and of the circumstances under which the paper came into my possession, and having dated and

signed it, put it in my pocket-book. It was, as I was aware, legally useless, but it was, at least, moral evidence against Mr. Louis Redwood, if at any time in the future its production would assist towards any good end. Honoria must have dropped it by accident in my room, otherwise it could not have fallen into George's hands.

There was nothing left for me to do in Chudleigh except to see Miss Haldane if she wished, and to take leave of Rachel, so I got my breakfast over quickly, and settled my bill at the "Brindled Cow."

My observation of the village and its inhabitants convinced me that it and they were under the absolute domination of Mr. Haldane. All the surrounding property and every house on it belonged to him; no leases were granted; the villagers were yearly tenants, liable to be turned away at any time. The power wielded by the master of the estate was autocratic. Thinking of this as I strolled towards the park, looking out for Rachel, some remarks made by Simpson

came to my mind: "This is a fine park, isn't it? Wish it was mine, without any mortgages on it. Mortgages are the very devil. A man may be the master of a great estate, and it may be no better than a white elephant." There is never smoke without fire, and these words, for which there must be some foundation, seemed to indicate that Mr. Haldane's tenure was not as safe as it appeared to be. "Has he been borrowing money of Mr. Louis Redwood?" I asked myself.

There was Rachel coming to meet me. What greatly impressed me in favour of George's sweetheart were her cheerfulness and briskness. I saw that they were natural to her, and that her disposition and good temper would brighten a home. Good heart, clear eye, brisk movement, pleasant voice, white teeth, pretty face, compact figure—what more could any father wish for in a wife for the son he loved? Add to this, common-sense, and you get very close to perfection.

Of course, after bidding me good morning, her first question was:

"Have you heard from George?"

"I have, my dear, and there's news in his letter. Honoria has disappeared again."

"O, dear! But you know where she is?"

"Not the slightest idea. She left without a word, and without George seeing her."

"I'm not sorry for that," said Rachel.

"George says she must have crept away like a cat."

"Is that all he says?"

"Nothing more about Honoria."

"But about anybody else?"

"Will be glad when I get home again."

"I wonder," said Rachel, "will he be such a tease as you are? The idea of you trying to make me believe that he could write you a letter without saying a word about me!"

"What a forgetful old father-in-law I shall make. There is something about you. Here it is. 'Give my love to Rachel, and say I am all right.' I hope that is satisfactory?"

"I shall not tell you," she said saucily; "I

shall tell George. Now come and see Miss Haldane."

The young lady was in the tennis-court giving instructions to a gardener, whom she left directly she saw me. As briefly as possible, for my time was running short, I related what had occurred, making, however, no reference to what Honoria had written on the bridge. Miss Haldane was visibly distressed at the news.

"But what is to be done, Mr. Millington?" she asked.

"Nothing," I replied, "except to wait and hear from Honoria. If she writes to me I am ready, as I told her, to do anything I can to assist her. She thoroughly understands that you are her friend, and whether she will allow us to aid her depends now upon herself."

"Honoria is proud," said Miss Haldane, "and the cruel accusation brought against her by Mrs. Porter before all the people, and the way she was treated by our servants here —I have heard something of that, Mr.

Millington—may have had a bad effect upon her. She may look upon us as her enemies. Poor Honoria! If she does not write, will you try and find her?"

"I promise faithfully I will. There is one good thing—she is not without means. She has the money you gave me for her, and she cannot want for a few weeks. I must bid you good-morning, Miss Haldane; I have to catch a train."

"I will not detain you; but I owe you some money. You paid Mrs. Porter something, did you not? I was almost forgetting it. Pray do not leave out anything or I shall never dare to ask you to do me another service. It must have been an expensive journey to London and back, and please remember that I have plenty of money."

I pencilled some figures and added them up, and she handed me the amount, amply repaying me for my trouble by thanking me cordially and shaking hands with me.

"I can spare you, Rachel," she said to her maid, with an affectionate smile. "You can

go with Mr. Millington to the station if you wish."

"Thank you, miss," said Rachel, and we were presently in the park.

"I shall be here again in a few weeks," I said to Rachel, "perhaps sooner. I am doing some private business for Mr. Haldane, but it must not be known that anything of that kind brings me here."

"I shall not speak about it," said Rachel, "but I should like to ask you something."

"What is it, my dear? I'll answer if I can."

"Is the private business anything to do with Miss Haldane?"

"Nothing."

"Or with Mr. Redwood?"

"Nothing."

"Thank you. That is all I want to know."

Then we fell to upon our pet theme—George—and chatted amicably and pleasantly till we were about half-way to the station, when I stopped.

"We'll say good-bye here, Rachel."

"But I'm coming to see you off."

"No, my dear. If I'm not mistaken I shall have another person to see me off, if he doesn't waylay me before I get to the station, and I should prefer that he doesn't see us too much together."

"Who is the other person?"

"Simpson. He has taken a violent liking to me."

"Has he?" said Rachel with sudden alarm. "Anything to do with Mr. Haldane's private business?"

"No, my dear, though he wouldn't have the slightest objection to having his finger in the pie."

"That's Mr. Simpson all over. Always poking and prying about. Don't trust him, Mr. Millington."

"I don't intend to, and I'll give you three good reasons why."

"Well?"

"First, he is as sly as a weasel."

"Yes, he is, Mr. Millington."

"Second, he is as cunning as a fox."

"Yes, he is."

"Third, he resembles a limpet in his sticking qualities."

"Yes, he does," said Rachel, laughing.

"Now, I don't like weasels or foxes or limpets; and when a gentleman——"

"Oh, no," protested Rachel; "not a gentleman!"

"When an individual, then, combines all the bad qualities of these three creatures in his own person, I like him still less. But at the same time, my dear, I don't tell him so. Rachel, it occurs to me that you might write me a letter now and then."

"I shall never know what to say!" said Rachel.

"If you have nothing to say, don't write. But something may happen that it would be as well for me to know. There's no telling whether I might not be of assistance in the case of a difficulty."

"Do you mean about Miss Haldane?"

"You've hit it, my dear."

"And Mr. Redwood?"

"You've hit it again, my dear."

"And about the young gentleman——" she paused here, and I took up her words.

"Who's trying to make a fortune over the water? You've hit it for the third time, my dear."

"I think I understand you," said Rachel, with a thoughtful look in her bright eyes; "and I will write to you if there's any occasion."

"It's a bargain," I said, patting her shoulder; "and what's more, it's a confidential matter between you and me that we'll keep to ourselves. The only other person I shall admit into our confidence is George. Good bye, my dear."

We kissed each other, and I strode to the railway station with a feeling of gladness that my visit to Chudleigh had turned out so well, as regards George and his sweetheart. The prospect in other quarters was not so cheering.

As I anticipated, Simpson was on the platform waiting for me.

"Couldn't let you go, Millington, without a parting hand-shake," said he.

"It would have been very unfriendly," said I, "if you hadn't come to see the last of me."

"Not the last of you, I hope," said he.

"Speaking figuratively, Simpson, it's quite on the cards you'll see a good deal more of me."

"Oh, yes, in London."

"Here in Chudleigh as well. Can you keep a secret?"

"Close as the grave."

"I am thinking of investing in land about here. A few spare thousands—couldn't do better with 'em. Don't blab, or the prices will run up. Mum's the word."

I put my finger to my lips, jumped into the train, and left him staring at me. Weasel, fox, and limpet as he was, he was rather slow in making up his mind.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. BARLOW.

In the railway carriage I turned my serious attention to the commission I had undertaken for Mr. Haldane, namely, to trace the history of Adeline Ducroz after she and Julius Clifford had separated in Paris; and it was only then that I properly estimated the extreme barrenness of the information he had —grudgingly, as it seemed to me—doled out.

First, the names of the two principal actors in a drama which certainly could not claim the merit of originality.

Second, the name of the steamer in which these actors made the voyage to New York.

Third, the year, but not the month, of the vessel's departure and arrival.

Fourth, some vague particulars of the state of affairs when Miss Ducroz and Mr. Clifford met on board the *Circassia*, and of the life the couple led in the States and elsewhere.

Nothing more.

Mr. Haldane's method of imparting the story to me did not increase my respect for him. It was a shuffling, evasive, vacillating kind of method, which innocent or strong-minded men never employ, and it did not blind me in the least. I even began to question how much of the story was true, and how much of it false, but I soon put a stop to this mental debate, knowing that to commit myself to definite conclusions upon evidence so entirely circumstantial would be likely to mislead me. Long before I reached London I had come to the end of my deliberations, and was dissatisfied with the result. George saw this dissatisfaction expressed in my face upon my arrival home, but was ignorant of its cause. I asked him about Honoria, but he had nothing to add to

the information he had given me in his letter. She had disappeared, that was all he knew; the sitting-room she had occupied was in perfect order, and it really became a doubtful point whether she was in the house in the morning when I took my departure for Chudleigh Park.

"Have you made any inquiries in the neighbourhood?" I asked.

"No," replied George, "I thought it best to do nothing till you came home, unless you telegraphed to the contrary. The paper I found in the room in which she speaks of committing suicide gave me a terrible turn, and I didn't know what to make of it. I should have gone straight to the police if I hadn't been afraid of making things worse, and if I hadn't remembered what you told me of the girl. 'Best leave it to dad,' I thought; 'he'll be sure to do the right thing.'"

"I'm not so sure myself," I said, "but I'm glad you kept quiet. I don't think there's much fear of Honoria doing any harm to

herself. The fit has passed off, and she has money in her pocket to help her along; and when that's gone she knows where to come for more. I don't want to lose sight of her if I can help it, but I've an idea that it depends more upon her than upon me whether I set eyes on her again.

I spent a quiet evening, thinking of what was before me, and the longer I thought the more convinced did I become that it would be folly for me even to commence the task I had undertaken single-handed. In such inquiries certain machinery is necessary which I had not at my command. Where was such machinery to be met with? Where else but in the firm of Barlow & Co., of which I was once a partner. And what more able man could I ask to assist me, to take, indeed, command of the ship, than Mr. Barlow himself? The moment I decided to call him in I felt relieved, and before I went to bed I posted a note to him, asking him to come to see me the following evening at half-past seven for the double purpose of business and

pleasure. "It is important business," I wrote, "and there will be a bit of supper at half-past nine."

My letter posted, George and I stopped up later than usual, and I did not consider it a breach of confidence to tell him something of what had occurred at Chudleigh Park and the Manor House, and what had passed between me and Mr. Haldane. I did not reveal everything; it would not have been prudent; therefore he did not know that "Austin," to whom Honoria had so despairingly written, and Mr. Redwood were one person. He was rather curious about Simpson, whose acquaintance, I said, he would probably have an opportunity of making, as that worthy had promised to pay me a visit when he came to London. Whatever subject we spoke upon took unfailingly one direction, Rachel, and I dare say he dreamt of her when he went to bed. My dreams were of Honoria, who was the most vivid bit of colour in the picture which the last two or three days had presented to me.

At ten o'clock the following morning I received a telegram from Mr. Barlow, to the effect that he would be with me at half-past seven in the evening. He is the most methodical being I have ever met with, and the records he keeps of the cases in which he is engaged are models of precision. They are sometimes more than that; they are literary models—for which he has a special reason. With a conscientious regard for the profession —he insists upon calling it a "profession"—in which he is engaged, and sternly refusing to have anything to do with disreputable cases, Mr. Barlow is fired with an ambition to become an author, and has confided to me that at some future time, when he has retired, as I have done, from active business, it is his intention, without mentioning names or betraying confidence, to use in a literary way some of the experiences he has gained in the "profession" he has practised for a great number of years. His discretion may be relied upon, and if he carries out his intentions the interesting result may find

a place by-and-bye on the book and railway stalls.

Punctually at half-past seven he made his appearance in Shepherd's Bush, and George, after the first friendly salutations, left us alone, having received the cue from me.

There was a jug of beer on the table, and pipes and tobacco, and when the pipes were set going we began to talk about the business which had brought us together. I commenced by telling him of George's love affair, and went on to the letter I received from Mr. Haldane, and how it was because I wanted to see George's sweetheart that I went down to Chudleigh Park. I related everything that occurred there, and Mr. Barlow sat and puffed and moistened his lips with the beer, and never interrupted me once. This was his way; to hear the story right through, and then to take it to pieces. I was altogether different from him; my impatience always got the better of me, and I felt myself forced to interrupt the speaker, with questions and observations. Mr. Barlow's

face was a mask, and you could never guess what was going on inside of him. I was a little disappointed that he could be so impassive with me, and when I had finished all I had to say, I told him so.

"It's habit, Millington," he said, "nothing more; don't worry about it. I drop the professional, and resume the friendly. Here's to you and yours, with my best wishes for George and his sweetheart. I shall expect to be invited to the wedding." He buried his face in the jug, and took a long draught. "And now for a chat. You've told me what has surprised me, though I didn't shew it; before we're done, you'll hear what'll surprise you. It's a queer story all round, and likely to be queerer as it goes on; we're only on the surface as yet. Honoria, now—she comes in by a side door, so to speak, commences with a small part. Wonder whether the character will grow! No, nothing uncommon about her, but something remarkably uncommon about this Mr. Clifford and Miss Ducroz, and something still more uncommon

that we—partners once, friends always—should be engaged in this affair."

"I don't see what you are driving at," I said.

"You'll see soon. Carry your mind back. When you were in the office we did some business for Mr. Haldane."

"I remember we did, but it was entirely in your hands. I was not acquainted with the particulars."

"Neither was I," said Mr. Barlow. "It originated in letters he had received—threatening letters—and he didn't show them to me. As well as I could make out some one demanded money under threats of exposure about something or other, and Mr. Haldane had made up his mind to pay the money to this agent, to save trouble, he said. He was as mysterious to me in his communications years ago as he was to you only yesterday or the day before. I never pry, Millington, when I find it's not to a client's taste; the responsibility is his, not mine. What I am asked to do, and paid to do, in the way of business, I

do if I can, and there's an end of it as far as I am concerned. But would you consider it strange if the affair he entrusted to you a day or two since has anything to do with the affair he entrusted to the firm a good many years ago?"

"I should."

"I shouldn't. The world is full of open graves. We're in confidence. What passes in this room is under seal. You are engaged to discover all about Adeline Ducroz after Julius Clifford left her in Paris towards the end of the year 1867. I am engaged to discover all about Julius Clifford from that year to this."

"You are joking," I said, greatly surprised by this singular disclosure.

"Not at all. The affair was placed in my hands three weeks ago, and I have already made progress. It is a curious coincidence, and will lead to developments. I have something still more strange to disclose. In this search I have two clients, who appear to be working independently of each other. Let

us argue the matter out, and, up to a certain point, join forces. It will save waste of power. What do you say?"

"I say, agreed."

"And I say, agreed. I will be as frank with you as you have been with me, and so that there shall be no confusion I will speak of my clients separately, as client number one and client number two. It is just twenty-two days since client number one introduced himself to me, saying that he had come upon recommendation, having heard a high opinion of me. He wished to place some business in my hands, and I accepted the commission. Some of the particulars given to me tally with some of the particulars given to you. For instance the names of two persons, Mr. Julius Clifford and Miss Adeline Ducroz. Also the name of the steamer in which these two persons travelled to New York—the *Circassia*. Also, the date of the departure of this ship, my information being more exact than yours, the month being named as well as the year, March, 1867. Also, the circumstance of

Mr. Clifford and Miss Ducroz—I will keep those names for the sake of clearness—living together in New York as man and wife. Also, their return to England, and their being together in Paris. Also, the circumstance of Mr. Clifford leaving the lady in Paris, and returning, presumably, to England, concerning which place of return my instructions are not precise. So far, the bare bones of the case presented to you and presented to me. In other important respects, upon which my information is fuller than yours, there are serious and important discrepancies, of which you shall presently judge. No instructions were given to me to trace Miss Ducroz, my mission being to trace Mr. Clifford; by which I infer that my client knows where the lady is to be found, as your client, I presume knows where the gentleman is to be found. You agree with me upon this last point."

"Certainly."

"Now, mark. Client number one does not inform me what he intends to do when he knows where to lay hands on Mr. Clifford.

All he says is 'Discover him, and tell me where he is to be found,' and no further instructions are given to me at present."

"Have you succeeded in discovering Mr. Clifford?" I asked.

"Up to the hour I closed my office to-day I have not succeeded in discovering him. For the present I dismiss client number one, and come to client number two. This day week he sent in his card, and was shown into my private room. 'Mr. Barlow,' he said. 'I am Mr. Barlow,' I answered. 'I wished to see you personally because I prefer to do with principals," said he. 'I want you to ascertain for me all that it is possible to ascertain of a lady and gentleman from about the year 1867' —mark the year, Millington—'to the present day. Will that be difficult?' 'It depends,' I said, 'upon circumstances. 1867 is a long way back. You must give me a starting point.' 'I will tell you as much as I know myself,' said he, 'and perhaps you will say it is very little. But the greater the trouble the greater the charge, I suppose.' 'That is

the case,' I said, 'and I should require a sum in hand for preliminary expenses.' 'You can have anything in reason,' he said, and I fancied he looked down on me rather. This fancy getting into my head I was half inclined to decline the commission there and then, but I thought it would look unprofessional, and that I would carry it a little further before I refused it. 'The names of the parties?' I asked. Imagine my surprise when he answered, 'Mr. Clifford—I am not sure about the first name—and Miss Ducroz—I am not sure about hers.' 'Any more particulars?' I enquired. He consulted a paper, and said, 'Some time during that year they had rooms in Norfolk Street, Strand; and some time during that year they went to America in a steamer called the *Circassia*. That is about the extent of my knowledge.' 'You can leave the matter with me,' I said, 'and I will see what can be done.' That was all that passed between us, except that he put twenty pounds in bank notes on the table before he went away, and that I said if

any of the money was spent I would give him an account of it, and that if nothing was done he should have the twenty pounds back. Now, Millington, what do you think is the name of client number two?"

"How is it possible for me to guess?" I said.

"Considering you know the gentleman," replied Mr. Barlow, "it is quite possible. His card bears the name of Mr. Louis Redwood, Honoria's friend."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD STORY.

This was strange news indeed. What did all this hunting down mean, each huntsman, without the other's knowledge, after the same quarry? I could find no words to express my astonishment, and I gazed in silence at the shrewd face of Mr. Barlow.

Presently he spoke. "I have not made up my mind what I shall do about Mr. Redwood's commission, but I shall probably throw it up in the course of this week. You have let in light upon his character, and I don't care to work for scoundrels. He means mischief, depend upon it."

"To whom?"

"To Mr. Clifford," replied Mr. Barlow, with a meaning glance at me, "and to Miss Ducroz as well, most likely. It is a lively tangle, and there are black sheep in it. Mr. Haldane has

given you one version of the story of Mr. Clifford and Miss Ducroz; I will give you another. Fill your pipe, and settle yourself comfortably; it will take a little time to tell properly."

Before I proceed to narrate what Mr. Barlow imparted to me, I must remind my readers of his literary proclivities. With a view to future reputation as an author he cultivates a style of his own, and whenever he gets the chance of putting the pieces of a puzzle together, and of weaving a story out of them, he makes the most of his opportunities in the way of embellishments. I must do him the justice to say that his ingenuity is kept within bounds by his common sense and his knowledge of human character. With these preliminary remarks I will let him speak for himself.

"Some twenty years ago there lived, down Oxford way, a married couple of the name of Kennedy. What their actual circumstances were I cannot say, but they lived in fair style, and were held in good repute. Mr. Kennedy

was an easy-going gentleman, and his wife an amiable, kind-hearted, and charitable lady. They had no children of their own, but had adopted a child, the orphan daughter of a distant relative. The name of this girl was Adeline Ducroz, who, at the time I am speaking of, was somewhat over twenty years of age. She was a high-spirited young lady, fond of gaiety and pleasure, and rather difficult to control, and this, perhaps, was the reason why, when she grew to womanhood, she did not get along as well as she might with the good people who had brought her up. Although Mrs. Kennedy had strict ideas as to propriety of conduct she had not sufficient strength of character to exercise proper control over a young, impressionable, and excitable woman. Nothing serious, however, occurred between them until the appearance upon the scene of a gentleman whose acquaintance Miss Ducroz had accidentally made outside the family circle. As to the manner in which this acquaintanceship was formed there is some ambiguity, but none whatever

in his prosecution of the intimacy. He and Miss Ducroz met frequently, but he did not come to Mr. Kennedy's house, which in itself was enough to throw doubt upon the honesty of his intentions. A little while after this was discovered Mrs. Kennedy remonstrated with Adeline, and made remarks upon the impropriety of clandestine meetings which the young lady resented. There were other features in the intimacy which alarmed the Kennedys. The gentleman was a stranger in the neighbourhood, and Adeline refused to disclose his name. It was evident that she was acting under his instructions, and that he had obtained a certain mastery over her. Mr. Kennedy might have sought him out for the purpose of forcing an explanation from him, but it unfortunately happened at this period that his entire attention was claimed by the state of his worldly affairs. Speculations into which he had entered had turned out disastrously, and after satisfying the demands made upon him he found himself almost beggared. He was compelled to give up his

home in Oxford, and, pending arrangements he was endeavouring to make for a new home and a fresh start in life, he came to London with his wife and adopted daughter, and took lodgings in Brixton. This might have proved a blessing to the young lady had it caused a break in her intimacy with her gentleman friend, but no such break occurred. Within a few days of their arrival in London he made his appearance again, and he and Adeline continued to meet. Again did Mrs. Kennedy remonstrate, to as little purpose as before. 'If he is courting you honestly,' said Mrs. Kennedy, 'let him come here to our home and yours.' It was of no avail. Adeline's lover did not present himself, and things went on in this miserable way until Mr. Kennedy's arrangements were completed for a fresh start. When Adeline was told that the new home was to be established in America, in one of the Western States, she was dumbfoundered. 'I cannot go,' she cried. 'I will not go!'

"I must make a break here," said Mr.

Barlow, "to say a few words on my own account. I don't expect you to believe, Millington, that everything I put into the mouths of the characters who play their parts in this drama of real life is exactly what was said by them, but without some such conjectural remarks and some such conjectural dialogue the drama would be incomplete. I am simply doing what is done in a trial built up on circumstantial evidence, building up my case. I do not pretend that Adeline said, 'I cannot go; I will not go'; but the words, in their effect, are as near as you can get (no reporter being present to take them down) when she said she would not go to America with Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy, and in my opinion they portray the scene faithfully. Nor do I pretend to state exactly what passed between her and Mr. Clifford. You will hear something more of these interviews before I have finished. In such a story as I am telling, from instructions and information I have received, we must be guided by our common sense. It is a fact that at first

Adeline did refuse to go, and it is a fact that during the three weeks that elapsed between the day that the Kennedys announced that they were going to America and the day they embarked on board the *Circassia*, Mr. Clifford made himself scarce—in plainer terms, that he and Adeline had no further clandestine meetings. Whether he had made proposals to Adeline to which she would not consent, or whether he was tired of his pursuit of her, I will not now state, but it is undeniably true that he was following the young lady with base intentions, and that she, believing in the honourable professions which such men make in such adventures, did not see through him until the hour arrived when he made plain proposals from which she shrank. You perceive, therefore, that I believe that, up to this time, Adeline was a virtuous girl—weak, of course, but still virtuous. For it was on the evening of this very day that she said to Mrs. Kennedy, after coming from a meeting with her lover, that she hoped they would forgive her, and that she would go with them

to the new home across the seas. So a peace was patched up, and preparations made for departure, during which my gentleman did not put in an appearance.

"Their astonishment, therefore," continued Mr. Barlow, "was all the greater when they saw him on board the *Circassia* as the vessel was steaming out of the Mersey. Mrs. Kennedy knew who it was by the heightened colour in Adeline's face, and by the look of joy which flashed into her eyes when they fell upon him. There was sadness in Mrs. Kennedy's eyes, and her face paled, as she realized the situation. 'Introduce us,' she said to Adeline, and the young lady went and spoke to him, and came back, saying that he would rather not be introduced, as she had thrown doubts upon his honour. That was rather a lofty way of putting it, and rather a mean way, too, of getting out of a difficulty; and, of course, Mrs. Kennedy could not ask a second time for an introduction. She could find out his name, however, through the passenger list, and she

did. It was Mr. Julius Clifford. So here we have them in company on board the *Circassia*, Mr. Julius Clifford and Miss Adeline Ducroz.

"They were very much together during that voyage. Mrs. Kennedy, being a bad sailor, could not keep a watchful eye on them, but she heard it from the other passengers, and Adeline's blithe spirits showed that she was happy, and again under his influence. The debatable question now with Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy was whether Adeline would go with them to the West. They asked her, and she said, without hesitation, 'Where else should I go?' Where else, indeed! 'And your friend, Mr. Clifford?' asked Mrs. Kennedy. 'He has some business in New York,' answered Adeline, 'which will detain him a week or two, and then he is coming on to us.' All false, as was proved: he had anticipated the questions, and had directed her how to answer them. Believing she spoke the truth the Kennedys were put off their guard, which was just what Mr. Clifford

wanted, and when they arrived in New York neither he nor Adeline was to be found. The Kennedys were deeply grieved, but they were powerless; Adeline was not their daughter, she was over age, and her own mistress; they had not the slightest authority over her. It had been their intention to remain in New York only one night, and to start the following day for the West; but they remained a week, hunting for the misguided girl. I don't know what good they expected to do when they found her, but they had a duty to perform, and they performed it. They had almost given her up in despair when they met her and Mr. Clifford in Central Park. Mr. Clifford would have hurried Adeline away, but Mrs. Kennedy stood in their path. 'What is your pleasure?' asked Mr. Clifford. 'Let me speak to you, Adeline,' said Mrs. Kennedy. 'Speak then,' said Mr. Clifford. 'Adeline and I have no secrets from each other.' Mrs. Kennedy wished to ask Adeline if she was married, but she did not dare to put the

question in the presence of Mr. Clifford; it would have been an open insult. She asked, therefore, instead, 'Are you happy, Adeline?' 'Are you happy, Adeline?' repeated Mr. Clifford. 'Quite happy,' replied Adeline, and indeed she looked as if she was. 'Quite happy,' repeated Mr. Clifford. 'I hope you are satisfied. Come, Adeline.' 'One moment,' said poor Mrs. Kennedy. 'Are you going to live in America?' 'Our movements,' said Clifford, with his eyes on Adeline's face, 'are uncertain.' And such was his power over her that she repeated his words as he had repeated Mrs. Kennedy's. 'Our movements,' she said, 'are uncertain.' Though I have little doubt that a moment before she did not know whether they were so or not. 'You have our address,' said Mrs. Kennedy. 'We shall be glad to see you at any time.' 'Much obliged,' drawled Mr. Clifford. 'And if ever you want a friend,' said Mrs. Kennedy, 'you will always find one in us.' 'She will never want one,' said Mr. Clifford, 'not in the way you mean.' 'I trust not, I trust not,'

murmured Mrs. Kennedy. Then she held out her hand, and Adeline took it and pressed it warmly. Perhaps at that moment the recollection of all that Mrs. Kennedy had done for her came to her mind. She offered her hand also to Mr. Clifford, and he, after a little hesitation, accepted it; and so they would have parted, but when Mrs. Kennedy turned and walked away a few steps, Adeline ran after her and kissed her, with tears running down her face and then ran back to Mr. Clifford. Bitterly did Mrs. Kennedy reproach herself afterwards that she did not ask Adeline if she was married; had the answer been what it should have been she would have left Adeline with a lighter heart. I think I see in your face, Millington, that you want to say something."

"I do," I said. "When Mr. Haldane told me that Mr. Clifford and Miss Ducroz lived together in New York, she bearing his name with his cognizance and consent, and making purchases in his name for which he paid, I told him it was as good

as a marriage, though no ceremony was performed."

"Is that the law?"

"It is the law in the State of New York," I replied.

"Ah; and what did Mr. Haldane reply?"

"That Mr. Clifford had already heard some nonsense to that effect."

"Some nonsense to that effect," repeated Mr. Barlow. "Denoting that he did not believe anything of the kind."

"That was what he intended to convey."

"And didn't want to believe it. Millington, I take it that you are satisfied that the account Mr. Haldane gave you of the first meeting between Mr. Clifford and Miss Ducroz on board the *Circassia* is false."

"Most certainly."

"It follows, then, that some other things he related to you are false."

"Yes, I should say so."

"He is a fool," said Mr. Barlow, "and something worse than a fool. You asked me, when I commenced my story, whether I had

succeeded in discovering Mr. Clifford. I answered that up to the hour of closing my office to-day I had not discovered him. I should give you a different answer now."

"Should you?"

"Yes. It is my deliberate opinion that Mr. Julius Clifford is no other than Mr. Haldane himself."

CHAPTER XIV.

BETRAYED.

Mr. Barlow had put in plain words a suspicion which had crossed my mind. He was not a man who was wise after the event, and I did not question the conclusion at which he had so promptly arrived.

"We have to consider," he continued, "what induces a client to so stupidly deceive the agent he employs. The kind of a man who acts in this way is either a man of weak character or a man so eaten up with pride and conceit that he cannot admit that he has done anything of which he ought to feel ashamed. The story Mr. Haldane related to you paints Adeline Ducroz black, and himself white; proclaims her an adventuress, and himself an honourable man. My belief is that he and his friend Mr. Redwood are both black sheep, with this difference—that

Mr. Haldane has sown his wild oats, and Mr. Redwood is still sowing. It is reaping time with Mr. Haldane. Somebody has threatened him; he is frightened of the past; there are skeletons, not in his cupboards, but standing at his door. So he calls you in, and while he is explaining what he wants done, lies to you, to prove, in case you suspect him, that he is a saint, and the woman he has wronged is a sinner. We will put him aside awhile, and go on with my version of the story. After this last meeting with Miss Ducroz in New York, Mrs. Kennedy went to her home in the West, where she remained for several years. And now there is introduced into the case evidence of a very peculiar kind, the first portion of which is in the form of letters written by Miss Ducroz to Mrs. Kennedy. These letters, with others not so clear, were preserved by Mrs. Kennedy, and are in my possession. As it happens I have them in my pocket, and can read them to you. They bear neither date nor address, but the stamps and postmarks on the envelopes indicate the

cities in which they were written. Here is the first :

"'My Dear Mother,—

"'I am writing to you without my husband's knowledge'——

"You will understand before I have finished," said Mr. Barlow, breaking off and looking up from the faded letter he was reading, "why, although she speaks here of Mr. Clifford as her husband, I have spoken of her all through as Miss Ducroz." He then resumed :

"'Without my husband's knowledge, and when we meet, which I hope we shall soon, please do not tell him that I ever wrote to you. Mr. Clifford is very kind to me, and very affectionate, but he is also very particular, and he would be angry with me if he found out that I did anything in opposition to his wishes. On the day we met in Central Park he said, after you were gone, "There is

no occasion, my dear Adeline, for you to keep up a correspondence with Mrs. Kennedy. By and by, when we visit them, she will get to know me better, and will do me justice." I did not promise not to write to you, so I am not exactly disobeying him, and I do not want you to reply to my letters, for I shall write to you again if I have time. My husband need not know about it. It has weighed on my mind that I have been ungrateful for all you have done for me, and I ask you now to forgive me. I cannot say anything more than that I am very, very sorry. If the past were to come over again I might act differently, but this confession does not make me any better. My reliance is upon your good heart and your feelings for me. It is a relief for me to write to you, and I feel happier already. My husband and I go out nearly every evening to theatres and other places of amusement, but during the day he leaves me alone sometimes to attend to his business affairs, and it is at these times, having nothing to do, that I feel lonely, and

long for someone to speak to. How I wish you were living near us! I hope you are happy and comfortable in your new home. With love to you and dear father,

"'I am, ever your affectionate daughter,

"'ADELINE.'

"There is not much in this letter," said Mr. Barlow, "except that it shows a craving for sympathy, and a fear of Mr. Clifford. In one sense it was a great satisfaction to Mrs. Kennedy; the writer spoke of Mr. Clifford as her husband. The second letter, which I shall now read, was written some weeks after the first, judging from the postmark on the envelope:

"'MY DEAR MOTHER,—

"'I have news for you which you will be sorry to hear. We are going to Europe. It is quite sudden, and I only knew it yesterday. I have been looking forward so to coming and staying with you a little while, and now, at the last moment, I am

disappointed. I told my husband how much I felt in leaving America without seeing you, and he says it cannot be helped. Our vessel starts to-morrow morning, and I have all my packing to do, so there is very little time for writing; but I could not go without sending you a line. It is a good thing I have not to run about, saying good-bye to people; we have made no friends since we have been here, and the only people I know are tradesmen. I shall write to you soon again—perhaps from the ship, perhaps from London. I think we are going there, but Mr. Clifford does not seem to have made up his mind where we shall live; he talks of travelling; I should like to be settled first and to travel afterwards. Good-bye. God bless you both.

"'Your affectionate daughter,

"'ADELINE.'

"There is not much in this letter, either," observed Mr. Barlow, "unless you read between the lines. It proves the complete

ascendancy Mr. Clifford has over her. His will is law. To a mild remonstrance against the sudden departure, of which she is informed only at the last moment, and which is to tear her from the only true friends she has in the world, he simply replies that it cannot be helped. No other explanation, although his preparations for leaving the country must have taken him some time to make. He does not confide in her: he keeps her in comparative seclusion; he issues commands which she has to obey. The romance is fading, and she is being brought face to face with reality. Her next letter bears the London postmark:

"'My Dear Mother,—

"'We have been in London three weeks, and I would have written to you before if I had not been ill. We had a dreadful passage, and I was not able to go on deck for a single hour. I was in bed from the first day to the last, and I feared I should never rise from it. I sometimes think it

would have been better for me if I had died at sea; all my trouble would have been over. It is wicked to have such thoughts, I know, but I cannot help it. I have nothing in the way of news that I dare tell you; it is only that I feel I must write to you. Mr. Clifford's plans are not settled yet, and I believe we are to start for Paris to-morrow. I do hope you are happy and prosperous. I will write again if I live.

"'Your loving daughter,

"'ADELINE.'

"The letter speaks for itself," said Mr. Barlow. "It is a confession of misery, and there seems to be no prospect of brighter days to come. She says she has no news that she dare tell—there is something significant in that. She does not speak of her 'husband' now, but calls him Mr. Clifford. The last intelligible letter is written in Paris:

"'How shall I write to you—what shall I say? We are here in Paris. They call it

"the gay city"; to me it is a city of darkness. Bitterly am I punished for not listening to your advice. I am cut off from all the world, and the only being at whose feet I would kneel for pardon, if I had the courage, is far away. Were I able to come to you, I should not dare; I should fly from you in terror and shame, and you would repulse me, as every good woman would if she knew the truth about me. Can you guess—can you guess? You are not bad, like me; your heart is pure; you have not sinned. But is the sin all mine? Am I alone responsible? I wander in darkness; I cannot pray. The present terrifies me, and I shudder at the future. And yet there are women who in my condition, would look forward with joy to the day when——But those women are not ashamed to look their sisters in the face; they have the right to hold up their heads; they are not disgraced as I am. Can you guess now? I would seek death if I dared, but I am too great a coward. My only solace is forgetfulness, oblivion, and I seek it shamefully.

Disgrace upon disgrace. I am glad you cannot write to me, that you do not know where to find me. But do not quite forget me. Think of me, not as I am, but as I might have been if I had been grateful for all your goodness to me, if I had shown you obedience.

"'Your unhappy

"'ADELINE.'

"So far," said Mr. Barlow, "these four letters tell a plain story, and upon the receipt of the last, Mrs. Kennedy, stirred by indignation and compassion, came to Europe in search of Adeline. She had very little money to prosecute her inquiries, and as might have been expected in consequence of that, and with clues so slight to guide her, she was quite unsuccessful. Not the slightest trace of Adeline could she find, and she was compelled to return to America no wiser than when she came. Meanwhile"—Mr. Barlow paused as we heard the street door open and shut—"Meanwhile," he continued, "here is

George come home, hungry for supper, and I feel peckish myself. Pop in at the office to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock, and you will hear some still more startling developments. Well, George"—as my lad entered the room—"what sort of a night is it?"

George answered that it was a fine night, and then our little maid appeared and set supper for us, which we enjoyed thoroughly, not a word being spoken about the business which had brought us together. But as I walked with Mr. Barlow down the street to catch a 'bus, he said:

"You have spoken of a daughter of Mr. Haldane's as if you liked her?"

"No one could help liking her," I said. "She is a lump of sweetness and goodness."

"That sounds well. Young?"

"About eighteen, I should say."

"About eighteen," said Mr. Barlow, and appeared to be reckoning up something in his mind. "By the way, are there any more children?"

"Not that I am aware of. I should say

decidedly not, or we should have heard of them through George's sweetheart."

"Only one child, then, a young lady about eighteen years of age. That opens up a new road."

"What is in your mind, Barlow?"

"Something that may be in yours when you hear the whole of the story. Mr. Haldane a widower?"

"I never inquired."

"No sign of a wife at the Hall?"

"None."

"Nor talk of the young lady's mother?"

"None."

"Here's my 'bus. Good-night. Don't be late to-morrow, Millington. Four o'clock—a little earlier if you like."

CHAPTER XV.

MR. BARLOW AT WORK.

So keen was my interest in the unfinished story he had related, and so eager was I to hear the conclusion, that I presented myself at the old office in Surrey Street at half-past three.

"I fancied you would be early," said Mr. Barlow. "Looks like old times having you here again. Before I go on with my story I have to give you a piece of information and to make a confession. I have thrown up the commission, so far as Mr. Louis Redwood is concerned. I wrote a letter to him this morning, enclosing the twenty pounds he left with me, and saying that I could not attend to his business. He will be wild at my refusal, and, as a gentleman who thinks no small beer of himself, will send me an im-

pudent letter in reply. I'll put up with that."

"I'm glad you've thrown him over," I said. "He is an infernal scoundrel, and I'd rather hinder than help him in any of his schemes."

"He'll have no difficulty in getting somebody else to take up the affair," said Mr. Barlow, "but we hold what threads there are, and it will be a hard job to work without them. My confession is soon made. I have spoken of client number one, for whom I am really working as a gentleman. I oughtn't to have misled you; client number one is a lady."

I nodded. It did not seem to me to be important, and it was a mistake in a personal pronoun any one might have made. During a short silence that ensued Mr. Barlow occupied himself in arranging a number of papers which he intended to read or refer to, odd pieces picked up apparently at haphazard, and pen and pencil appeared to have been indiscriminately used. Among them were several sheets of letter and note paper,

soiled and creased ; part of the writing was large, part very small and fine; and the whole collection was evidently the work of a person or persons who did not have proper writing material always at command. The manuscripts were numbered in red ink, and this sign of order, I judged, was the work of Mr. Barlow.

"I saw client number one this morning," he said, "and told her that I was disclosing the particulars of the story to a friend who might be useful to me in the inquiry. Her answer was that I could manage the affair in any way that suggested itself to me. All that she asks at present is that I shall track Mr. Clifford, if he is alive, and let her know where he is to be found. Now, Millington, I put it to you straight. Shall we continue to act as partners in this job, or shall we work independently of each other ? "

"Continue to act together," I replied.

"I can't see anything wrong in the partnership," said Mr. Barlow, thoughtfully. "You have already learned something from me that

may assist you, and you will presently learn a great deal more ; and I have already learned something from you that may assist me. The difference is that my version of the story is the true one, yours the false. You will be able to go to Mr. Haldane and say, 'I can now tell you something of the history of Adeline Ducroz after the separation in Paris between her and Mr. Julius Clifford.' I may be able to go to my client and inform her where Mr. Clifford is to be found. Each of us, then, will have executed his commission, and what consequences may follow, and what further commissions may be offered to us, are not, at present, matters for our consideration. This being understood, I will go on from where I left off last night.

"After her unsuccessful search for Adeline in London and Paris Mrs. Kennedy returned to America. During her absence some communications from the unfortunate young woman had been received by Mr. Kennedy, and in America other communications reached them from time to time. These communi-

cations cannot be described as letters, for, except upon the envelopes, they are not addressed by name, nor do they bear any signature; but they are indubitably in Adeline's handwriting, although the character of that writing is strangely altered. It is a wonder how some of these communications reached their destination, so imperfectly were they addressed, and there is more than a reasonable likelihood that a number must have miscarried. The papers you see on the table are the communications of which I am speaking; they were handed to me by my client, and it has taken a great deal of labour to arrange and decipher them. In places they were almost illegible, and, where I could, I have written in the words which were most likely used, or intended to be used. The chronological arrangement was difficult, but I think I have managed it fairly well. With this explanation I will make a start.

CHAPTER XVI.

ADELINE DUCROZ'S DIARY.

The doctor has been here. He tells me I have been very ill, and that I must take care of myself. I know I have been ill, but what is the use of taking care of myself? I ask this question of the doctor. He says it is a duty.

"Duty!" I cry. "To whom?"

"To yourself," he answers. "To others."

I keep on repeating these words in my mind, over and over again. "It is a duty," I say, "to myself, to others." The doctor, all the time, standing and looking down upon me.

"But I do not care for myself," I say presently.

"Then do not consider yourself," he answers; "consider others."

I repeat the last two words over and over again in my mind. "Consider others—consider others—consider others."

"Who are the others, doctor?" I ask.

"First, the living," he answers, very slowly. He speaks so in compliance with my request; when people speak quickly to me now I cannot understand them, I get confused. Even as it is, I often have to repeat what they say, to make sure.

"First, the living," I say. "Give the living a name."

"He has one," says the doctor. "Your friend."

"Have I a friend," I ask, "here in this black land?"

"You have," he answers. "Clear your mind of disordered fancies. The land is not black; it is the brightest in the world. You are a lady of good education and natural intelligence. Give your abilities fair play."

"Never mind the land," I say, "never mind my education and intelligence. Name my living friend."

"Mr. Clifford," he says. "Surely you do not forget!"

"O, Mr. Clifford," I say. "No, I do not forget. How can I forget doctor, with such abilities and intelligence as mine?"

"That is much better," says the doctor. "Keep it always before you that you have intelligence and abilities, and that you mean to exercise them—they are the gifts of God, remember—and then you will not forget."

"I will try as hard as I can," I say, "not to forget."

"Now I have hopes of you," he says, "and shall leave you till the evening."

But I call to him not to go yet; that there is something forgotten. He puts down his hat and stick, and inquires what it is.

"You spoke of a duty to others," I say.

"Yes," he answers.

"And then you said, 'First the living,' and you gave him a name."

"Perfectly correct," he says. "Your mind is getting clearer."

"That is not all," I say, "Mr. Clifford is

only one, and you spoke of others. Who follows the living Clifford?"

He hesitates a moment before he speaks.

"You will soon hold to your breast a gift from God."

I control the anguish that is about to overpower me; I can be strong even now sometimes with a strength born of black bitterness.

"Another of God's gifts!" I cry. "I am truly blest. How grateful I ought to be!"

"You are truly blessed," he says, with gentle voice and mocking eyes; I can fathom hidden meanings.

I turn from him; I cannot bear to look at his face, seemingly so kind. He is at the door.

"Come back!" I cry.

He comes at once, and says, "Well?"

"You said just now I was a lady. Why do you mock me?"

"I do not mock you," he says. "Heaven forbid I should mock you!"

"Do not speak so much of heaven and

gifts of God," I say. "You know I am not a lady. You know I am a shameless woman."

He sits by my side; he takes my hand; he preaches a sermon upon the ways of life; he makes light of sin; he says these things are common, and that I must not take it so much to heart. I tear my hand from him.

"Go," I cry. "Leave me before I do you a mischief!"

He is gone and I am alone. I will not think of what he says—I will not, I will not, I will not! All that I will endeavour to do is to forget. I know what will deaden my senses, what will help me to forget. . .

* * * * *

There was a conversation in my room; they thought I was asleep. I lay still, deceiving them; they spoke in low tones, but I heard every word.

"Is she any better?" It was Clifford who spoke.

"She is no better, and no worse." The doctor was speaking. "She loses control of herself."

"Will she die?"

"It is impossible to say. Life and death are more in her hands than mine."

"The usual cant is that life and death are in God's hands."

"I do not employ the usual cant. I am guided by material facts, by common sense."

They spoke in French; thanks to my education I understand the language, and German as well. Would it have been better for me if I had been a gutter child? I am a gutter woman; I have made myself one. Who can say mine has been an idle life?

"If she dies there will be an inquest?" Clifford again.

"It cannot be avoided."

"And I shall have to give evidence?"

"You will be questioned."

"My name will be dragged in?"

The doctor does not answer. My eyes are closed, but I can see him shrug his shoulders. Clifford's name will be dragged in—his name, that he is always prating about! His name—his honour! "I will not be disgraced! You

shall not disgrace me!" How many times has he said that to me? I shall not disgrace him! Has he not disgraced me? But what does that matter? I am only a woman. He is a gentleman. He has said it to me a hundred times. "I am a gentleman; remember that!" Yes, he is a gentleman. He has behaved to me like one. And if I die, and he is questioned, as the doctor warns him he will be, some doubt may be thrown upon the title he claims. That is his fear. He thinks ever of himself, never of me. How long ago is it, when I was living in the happy home with which I was not contented, that a young girl in our neighbourhood was as I am now? She came back with her load of shame. She was spurned—flouted at; in the end she disappeared, no one knew where. And the gentleman who had dragged her down walked about with a smiling face. No one reproached him, no one. He was received in society; mothers allowed him to associate with their daughters; he spoke at public meetings; he was honoured, respected. And

she! poor Mary Sternhold—where was that lost spirit wandering? What was her end? What will be mine?

The conversation between Clifford and the doctor went on.

Said the doctor, "You wish her to live?"

"Of course I wish her to live," said Clifford. "Do you think I have no heart?"

That was a plain question. The doctor did not answer it. Why did not Clifford ask *me?* I could have answered him.

"Do everything in your power," said Clifford. "She takes too gloomy a view of her situation. I will see that she is comfortably provided for. She would be happy if it was not for her vile temper."

"She is young enough for happiness," said the doctor.

"If all girls were like her," said Clifford, "it would be unbearable. You know what life is."

"Yes," said the doctor, "I know."

His voice was quite callous, and yet his nature is not unkind. It was man of the

world speaking to man of the world. Could they have put their experiences side by side, and compared them agreeably? I dare say. Since I left my home I have learned much. Bitter knowledge—bitter experience! My punishment is just; but should not the man be punished as well as the woman?

"You can do something," said the doctor, "towards helping her to a healthier frame of mind. Treat her with great gentleness; humour her; sympathize with her; win her back to cheerfulness. Are her parents living?"

"She is an orphan."

True. The good souls who call me their daughter are not my parents. They adopted me as their child, and reared and educated me, not out of charity, but out of pure goodness of heart. How have I repaid them?

"Has she only you to depend upon?" asked the doctor.

"I suppose so," replied Clifford, fretfully.

It hurt him to acknowledge it.

"Follow my advice," said the doctor, "and

all will be well. They suffer more or less when the parting comes, if the separation is not of their own seeking. Which sometimes happens."

"I wish it would happen with her," said Clifford; "but she has no independence of spirit. If I were a woman I would not be tied to a man who wanted to get rid of me!"

There he spoke his mind, thinking I did not hear. He had not said it so plainly to my face, but I knew it all the time.

"As she does not choose to leave you of her own accord," said the doctor, "you have a certain responsibility."

"I cannot do more than offer to provide for her," said Clifford, in a savage voice. "If she knows what's good for her she will consent to what I propose. What more can a woman want?"

What more? Love, faithfulness, truth, honour. Clifford looks upon woman as a piece of merchandise, to be bought and sold. I know now sufficient of the world to know that this traffic is pursued in the open market,

but then both buyer and seller bargain with their eyes open. Does Clifford dare to think that I belong to the shameless crowd? If he does, why did he swear to me that I should be his wife; why did he make me believe that I was his wife? And now, now, he tells me that he lied to me, that he deliberately deceived me! What does such a man deserve?

The doctor went away; Clifford and I were left alone. He came to my bedside; I did not open my eyes but I saw him gazing at me. The silence was terrible; I could not bear it.

"Who is there?" I murmured, pretending that I had just awoke.

"It is I, Clifford," he answered.

"Have you been here long?" I asked.

"I have this moment come in," he said.

Even in such a simple matter as this he could not speak the truth. He inquired if I was any better, and I said yes, lying to him as he lied to me.

"Shall we talk sensibly together?"

"Say what you please," I answered.

"I must leave Paris," he said. "Important business calls me away."

"Very well, Clifford. I will go with you."

"You are not strong enough."

"I am quite strong enough. Do we leave to-morrow?"

"You cannot accompany me. I will arrange so that you shall be comfortable. There, there! Don't make things worse than they are."

"Do you think they can be worse?"

"Are you going to be unreasonable again?"

"I have never been unreasonable. I am a human being like yourself. You vowed and swore to me——"

He interrupted me with, "No more of your whining! I'm sick of it. You will drive me away in anger. What will you do then?"

"What will I do then?" I cried. "Publish your treachery to the world! Make your name, that you're so proud of, a bye-

word! Drag you down to the level to which you have dragged me!"

"You will?" he exclaimed, with white face and set teeth.

"I will!"

He dashed out of the room, leaving me alone with my despair. It is at these times that I seek oblivion. Solitude is awful to me, and he knows it. I crept out of bed, and sought my solace. I drank glass after glass. I laughed, I sang, I tried to dance, and then I fell to the ground and forgot everything.

* * * * *

If ever you receive this, you whom I called mother once, but dare not call so now, pity and forgive me! You will shudder at my words, but I have imposed it on myself as a penance to write what comes to me to write, though it shows the blackness of my soul. And I shall find a way to send it to you, however strict is the watch they set upon me. I shall disguise nothing that I can remember; I shall write nothing that I believe is false; I

shall not seek to excuse myself, nor to make the degradation into which I have fallen less than it is. This is the punishment I shall inflict upon myself.

I think I should have been a better woman if I had not been so deceived, but it is only a thought, and perhaps I am deluding myself. I could never have been as you are; your soul is white; but I should never have been what I am now, what I have been driven to by Clifford. I have seen good women with children about them, women who have never been led into sin with honeyed words by smiling men, and I might have been worthy to walk by their side had I not met with Clifford.

I have not told you before; I will tell you now.

Long before we started for America he wanted me to leave you, but I refused, though I loved him with all my soul. "Why do you refuse," he asked, "if you love me as you say you do?" "It is right," I replied, "that I should be married from my mother's

house." "I do not like your people," he said, "and they do not like me. What can it matter where we are married?" I gave in so far, and asked when we should be married. "Bye and bye," he answered. "But when?" I urged. "Bye and bye," he answered again. "Leave all to me. Make your preparations, and we will go away and be happy to-morrow night. Say nothing at home." I did not yield, though he pressed me hard, and swore he would deal honourably by me. The influence of your good teaching was upon me then, and guided me aright. The strength of that influence was proved by my love for Clifford and by what I suffered in refusing him. Then he came to London, and sought and found me there. And still he pressed me to fly with him, and still I refused. When you told me that we were to go to America I was overwhelmed with despair at the thought of losing him, and I said I would not go with you. On that night I met him by appointment and informed him of your plans. He commended me for my

spirit, and proposed that I should go with him at once, and not return home ; but when I spoke again of marriage, his only reply was that I must trust him entirely, and that he would be true and faithful to me. "I will wait for you in London, and when you are ready to marry me I will be yours." He protested that I had no confidence in him, and that he would be satisfied with nothing less than my immediate consent to his proposal. "You must choose," he said, "between me and your people. If you go from me to-night I will never see you again." I did choose, though my heart was almost broken, loving him as I did. I returned home, and told you I would come with you to America. You will remember all this.

I am interrupted, and must wait till I am alone to continue ; but I will manage to put what I have written into the post, so that you may know, if you never hear from me again, that I did not fall without a struggle.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DIARY CONTINUED.

I KNOW where I left off. There are times when my memory is quite gone, when reason deserts me, when I live only in a world of phantoms. The images that haunt me are not always horrible ; God is merciful, and sends me dreams which banish the horrors of the living day. I am grateful for them, though the awakening is terrible. It is when I am sensible and thinking of you that my memory returns. So now I know, being alone, with no one watching me, that I left off where I made my choice between Clifford and you.

I never expected to see him again, and I thought that no hope of happiness remained to me. When I saw him on the steamer, on the day we left England for America, I was

dizzy with wonder and joy, and when I heard from his own lips that he felt it would be worse than death to part with me, and that that was the reason of his joining the ship, the world was a brighter, happier world than it had been since the night I tore myself away from him in London.

"Do you need further proof of my devotion?" he asked; and I answered, "No."

From that moment I was his slave. Everything I told you about him and myself was spoken at his dictation. He had no business to transact in America; he was going because I was going, and we were to get married there. So I lied to you, at his bidding, he promising that when he had conquered the resentment he felt against you, we should all be friends once more. I looked forward to that time. The deceit I was practising did not shock me then as it shocks me now; it seemed a small price to pay for the proof of love he had given me. I believed in him as you believe in God, and thought he could do no wrong. So we landed in New York, and

I left you without saying good-bye. We did not meet again till we saw you in Central Park.

On the day after our arrival Clifford took me to a private office, and there some words were spoken by a man I never saw again, and Clifford and I signed a paper which he put in his pocket. Before that he had placed a ring on my finger, and when we were in the street, he told me we were married by civil process, and that there was no country in the world in which these things were so easily and quickly done as in America. He spoke to me then about his private position in England; it was the first time he had done so, and I believed every word he said, though I did not rightly understand what it was all about. Our marriage must be kept secret for a time, he said, or his prospects would be ruined. He was dependent upon a relative, an old lady over eighty years of age, who could not possibly live more than a year or two, and who had made him promise that he would not marry during her lifetime. When

she died he would be her heir, and there would be no longer any occasion to keep the secret of our marriage. I was very happy at that time; Clifford was behaving most kindly to me, and as I went by his name I did not dream that he was deceiving me. He warned me to say nothing whatever of our marriage to you in case we met. "I will tell her when we are friends," he said, "but she must promise me first to keep our secret faithfully till my good old aunt is gone." That is why I said nothing to you in Central Park, and why, if you had asked me direct questions, I could not have answered them, for Clifford claimed obedience from me, and it was my duty to obey.

When was it that I seemed to see clouds gathering around me? Before we left New York for England, certainly — yes, certainly before that time. The first two or three weeks he was constantly with me; he never went out without me, and he was always studying how we should pass the days agreeably. "Do you like this — would you like

that? Shall we go here to-night, or is there any other place you would like me to take you?" Then came a gradual change; he left me in my room in the hotel for hours together of a night, and when I ventured to complain a little he told me not to be too exacting. My temper is not a patient one; you know that, and perhaps I was unwise in showing him this too soon; but I could not control myself. Clifford only laughed at me.

"We are none of us perfect," he said. "I am beginning to find you out, Adeline; presently you will begin to find me out."

It was not till some time afterwards that, in thinking of these words, I knew they must have been spoken with meaning, and that Clifford was not sorry to discover that I was not an angel, because it furnished him with an excuse for his own wickedness. When he ordered me to pack my trunks suddenly for England we had a scene; I was hot, he was cool.

"If you don't care to come," he said, "I will go alone."

A chill struck my heart as he said this; and on that evening I began to think of the future with fear.

"Will you come, or stay?" he asked.

"You insult me by asking such a question," I answered. "My place is by your side."

He looked at me quietly for a moment or two, but said nothing more, nor did I. On the following day we started for England. I was very ill during the voyage, but he paid me little attention. He seemed to take no pleasure in my society, and his manner towards me was entirely changed. It was the same in London, and I was frightened to complain for fear of angering him. I had no one but him, not a friend to whom I could speak, whose advice I could ask. Sometimes, when I forced myself to be bright, and took pains with my dress and appearance to please him, he behaved better to me; but I could not always play the hypocrite. Besides, I was weak and ill, and utterly, utterly wretched. . . .

* * * * *

It was here, in Paris, that I heard of my disgrace; it was here, in this hateful city, reeking with vice and shame, that I learned what I had become. I will hide nothing from you; I stab myself by showing you how vile and abandoned I am. Before the blow fell I began to drink, and I do not seek to excuse myself by saying it was Clifford who led me on. But it was he who placed temptation in my way, who drank with me, who first said:

"Drink, and forget."

It does not affect him, but it drags me down, down! I loathe it and love it. "Here am I, at your hand," it whispers, for it is always there; he does not seek to deprive me of my solace, I will say that of him; "here I am, at your hand. Drink, and be happy." Be happy! What a mockery! But I cannot resist it. Even now my eyes are wandering towards it; even now my trembling hands are stretched towards it; but I resist, because I am writing to you, because, before I am utterly lost,

you shall know the full extent of my degradation.

We had a quarrel. Whose fault it was I cannot say—his, mine; we each had an equal share in the scenes that were growing common. He had left me alone for two long days and nights. On the second night I went to seek him. Where? I knew not. I did not know the name of a place he frequented; Clifford can be very close about his affairs. The streets were open to me; I went into them, and wandered hither and thither, looking into the faces of men whose figure resembled Clifford's. Some looked back into my face, and laughed; some followed me till I quickened my steps and left them behind. I was familiar with the neighbourhood, but not with the names of the streets I walked through; I am a greater stranger here in Paris than I was in London. There is not a man or a woman whose hand I have the right to clasp in friendship. The city was in a glare; the lights of shame were flaming all around me. I trod the principal thorough-

fares; it was no use to look for Clifford in narrow streets; he is fond of gaiety, laughter, quick life. "I hate your dull, moping faces," he has said to me; "give me light and animation." I sought him where he was most likely to be found, and sought him in vain. So hurriedly had I left our apartment —having only one object in view—that it was not till I was in the open that I saw I had forgotten my gloves. It mattered little; I could keep my hands beneath my mantle. I continued my search till midnight, when the people were coming from the theatres. I must have been delirious from fatigue and despair, else I should not have darted forward and placed my hand on a man's arm, thinking it was Clifford. The man was a stranger to me and a thief; he seized my hand, and in a moment the rings were torn from my fingers, and I was flying in terror from him, dreading further violence. I did not stop till my breath was spent, and then I found myself in a part of the city which was not familiar to me. The street in which I paused to recover

my breath was almost deserted. I did not care to accost anyone to inquire my way, and I wandered about till I heard the bells strike the hour of two. I looked around and recognized the locality, and shortly afterwards I reached our apartment. The man who opened the gate looked strangely at me as I passed through, but I did not linger to explain to him the cause of my late arrival. I ran upstairs in the hope of seeing Clifford, but the rooms were empty. Then I looked at my bruised fingers, and to my horror discovered that all the rings Clifford had given me were gone, even my wedding ring. It was the loss of this ring which cut me to the heart ; I did not value the others, although they had been Clifford's gifts to me in happier times. Dressed as I was I threw myself on a couch and fell asleep.

When I awoke it was broad daylight, and Clifford was sitting in the room.

" Awake at last," he said, and his voice was not unkind ; it was indulgent, even cordial. " You sleep well, Adeline."

I approached him, and asked him where he had been these last two days and nights.

"We are free agents, you and I," he said, with a wicked smile. "I might retaliate by asking where you have been, and why I find you in this state at such an hour."

I passed my hand across my eyes; the full reflection of what I had passed through had not come to me. I looked down at my dress; it was torn and disordered; then I remembered all, and I related what had occurred, sobbing bitterly, as I spoke of the theft of my wedding-ring.

"It is an ingenious story," said Clifford, "and well told. If I were a younger man I might believe it."

"You do not believe it?" I exclaimed, indignantly.

"I am not exactly a fool," he said.

Dumb with passion and anguish I sank into a chair.

"I have something to say to you," he continued, "of an interesting nature. If you are going to make a scene I shall bid

you good-day, and you may never hear it. Be cool, as I am, and we may come to an understanding."

Yes, he was cool, while every nerve in my body was quivering.

"Shall I speak?" he asked.

"Yes, speak," I replied.

"Observe first," he said, "that I have heard your story, and make no comment upon it."

"Except," I said, keeping my passion down "that you do not believe it."

"Therefore," he continued, "I do not question you about it. You are agitated, naturally, at your failure to impose upon me, but I recognise your right to act as you please, and will not trouble you to invent another version of your doings last night which might have a better success."

"You are inflicting a foul wrong upon me," I said, "and when you speak of my right to act as I please, you are speaking of what does not exist. I have no such right."

"You have the right," he said. "I repeat

it, and before I have done I may convince you of the fact. You leave these rooms at nine o'clock last night; you return at three this morning. Do I complain? Not at all; and yet you are angry because I do not scold you."

"I have told you why I went out," I said, "and how it was I kept out so long."

"And I have heard what you said," was his reply, "and place my own interpretation upon it. An unreasonable man would find fault with you, and I do not utter one word of reproach. You feel lonely; you go out to seek amusement."

I interrupted him. "Take care. You may go too far."

"As the subject is displeasing to you," he said, "I will drop it. If it is revived you will be the responsible party. There is really a kind of poetical justice in the circumstance of your losing what you call your wedding-ring."

"What I call my wedding-ring!"

"That is what I said. There are plenty of

wedding rings on the fingers of women who have no legitimate right to wear them. Why do you stare at me? The truth must be told some time, and there is no time like the present. It is an awkward confession to make, but the honest truth is——"

He paused, seeing, I think, that I was on the point of swooning. Uncorking a bottle of champagne he poured out a tumblerful, and held it towards me. I took it from his treacherous hand, and drank it feverishly. It brought strength back to me.

"Let me hear," I said, "what the honest truth is."

"The honest truth, Adeline, is that you are not my wife."

How I managed to preserve my senses at this infamous revelation is a mystery, but some inward force sustained me. He continued:

"Now you know. There was no other way for it, Adeline. I was madly infatuated, and you insisted upon being married; so, to please you, we went through a meaningless cere-

mony. We have got along badly lately, and have found that we are not suited to each other. Let us make the best of a bad bargain; let us part friends. I will see that you are provided for. No man could speak fairer. What do you say to my proposal?"

I stood before him, with my hand on the table, steadying myself, and commanding my voice, still inwardly sustained.

"This," I replied. "Whether you have practised upon me an infamous deception or not, I am your wife in the eyes of God. To the last day of my wretched life I will stand by my right. Judge by my calmness in this, the most terrible moment in my life, whether I shall adhere to my resolve. I have lost your love—I knew that long ago—but I will not let you go. I will follow you and pursue you; if you desert me now I will find a means to expose you and hold you up to the scorn and contempt of the world; your name shall be a bye-word of shame, aye of shame as great and deep as mine! Only by my death shall you be released from the vows you swore

to me. God shall punish you, and I commit vengeance into His hands. I am an erring, weak and sinful woman, but you shall not be permitted to evade the double duty by which you are bound—your duty to me whom you confess to have shamefully betrayed, and your duty to your unborn child. Through me, and through your child, retribution shall fall upon you!"

What more I said I cannot recall. My strength gave way, and I became unconscious.

* * * * *

How many days, or weeks have passed since I last wrote? I cannot say. Time is blotted out. A woman is attending to me.

"Who are you?" I ask. "You are a stranger to me."

"Be composed," she answers. "I am your nurse."

"Who sent you here?"

"Your friend."

"Friend! I have none."

"You have. Do not agitate yourself. It is bad for you."

"I must know who the person you call my friend is."

"Be calm. It is an English gentleman."

"Is his name Clifford?"

"That is the name. Ask no more questions."

"I will not be silent. You shall answer me. What are your instructions? To kill me?"

"Mon Dieu! No. To take care of you. To give you everything you want. To be good to you. It is not every woman in your position who has such a friend. You are very fortunate."

"Am I? Where is he—my husband?"

"Your husband?"

"My husband. Do you hear me? You are looking for my wedding ring. It was stolen from me. Where is he?"

"I do not know."

"Are you paid to give me that answer? Am I in Paris?"

"You are."

"The vile, hateful city!"

"You are raving. It is the brightest, the most beautiful on the face of the earth."

"Yes, you are a Frenchwoman. Thank God, I am not. Have you been long with me?"

"Three weeks."

"And I have lain here unconscious all the time. Has he not been here once to see me?"

"I do not know."

"You are a poor creature to answer in that way. You must know if you have been with me. But you are paid, you are paid."

"Attend to me madame," says the woman roughly. "If you are civil I will be civil, and it will be for your good. If you are not it will be bad for you. I will give you a lesson."

She holds me down with one arm and hand; her muscles are like steel; I cannot raise myself an inch. I make but one effort; then I submit, and seeing that I no longer struggle she removes her hand, saying:

"Some questions I will answer, some I will

not. It is for you to make me a friend or an enemy."

"You shall be my friend."

"It is good. Say what I can do for you."

"There is a little desk somewhere."

"Your desk. Yes, it is here."

"Bring it to me."

She brings it to the bed, and assists me to rise, putting pillows at my back. Then she brings me my clothes, and, although I am very weak, I find the key of the desk in a pocket, and open it, the woman watching me. A purse is in the desk, with money in it.

"How much will a wedding ring cost?" I ask.

"A wedding ring!" she cries, raising her hands and laughing. "But what for? It makes no difference!"

"We are friends," I say. "Measure my finger, and tell me how much a ring will cost."

"Perhaps forty francs," she says, humouring me.

"Here are two English sovereigns. Go out and buy me one."

She laughs more heartily than before, takes the money and leaves the room. My purse contains six sovereigns and some silver, so I have four pieces of gold left. I have more than that. In a secret drawer in the desk are two five pound notes and ten more sovereigns in gold. I take this money from the drawer and secrete it under my bed. The purse I leave as it is, as the woman saw it, with the four sovereigns and the silver in it. She can steal that if she is so inclined.

What is it that attracts me on a chest of drawers near my bed? I look at it, I turn my eyes away, I look at it again. Very, very slowly, because of my weak state, I crawl from the bed, and fill a glass from the bottle and drink it off. It warms, it cheers, it exhilarates me. No more; I must be cunning, wary. I creep back to bed, all my pulses singing, my wretchedness lightened, and presently the woman returns, humming the refrain of a popular song.

"I have it, my babe," she sings, "the magic ring, which some wear who should not, and

some don't who should. The difference between them is——"

She blows a light breath through the hoop, and uses it as an eyeglass, looking at me through it. Then she tries it on my finger, and we both contemplate it. She regards it as a joke, I as a link of infamy, but neither of us expresses her thought.

"It is thirty-five francs," she says.

"You may keep the change," I say, "for your trouble, and because we are friends."

"You are charming," she says. "Yes, my babe, we are friends."

As, by my directions, she takes the desk from the bed and places it on a chair by my side, her eyes fall upon the bottle. She lifts it to the light, and turns her eyes upon me.

"It has done me good," I say.

"One more small glass, then," she says merrily, "and I will drink with you."

From that moment she seems to understand my craving, and she assists me in satisfying it.

* * * * *

Another interval of time, the duration of which I cannot state. I wake from a long, long dream, burning with fever. Another woman is in the room now with my nurse.

"To-morrow?" she says to her companion, in a tone of inquiry.

"Not to-morrow," the strange woman replies; "but before the week is over."

What do they mean? I toss my head this way and that. The stranger leaves the room.

"I am on fire!" I cry.

"Drink then, my pretty one," says my nurse, "and keep your strength. You will want it all."

She sits by the bedside, and we make merry together. She sings snatches of songs, and I join in.

"In two weeks you will be up, and dancing about," she says.

"I should like to dance now," I reply, but the attempt I make is futile.

I fall back on my pillow, and watch her figure swell to an enormous size, then dwindle

smaller and smaller till she lies in her chair in baby clothes.

Baby clothes! The room is filled with them. Now I know what the two women meant when they were talking together. My baby is coming, and will be in my arms before the week is over. Where is the father? Where is my false husband? He is my husband, though I loathe the sight of him. What an infamous trick! And once I looked up to him as the embodiment of truth and manliness. There he is now, waiting for me at the trysting place. The night is dark, but I can see his handsome smiling face.

"My darling!" he whispers, and presses me to his heart.

Ah! He is choking me! I am suffocated —dying——

"Be still, be still!"

It is my nurse's voice, and her arms enfold me, and hold me fast.

"Be still, be still! You will do yourself harm. Do you hear, my pretty one. Think of your baby. Drink this."

Something is poured down my throat. I have no power to resist, no power to move.

Black night enshrouds me. I wander in darkness. Not a rift of light, not a glimpse of the sun There are other shadows around and about me.

"Speak to me, sister!"

The voice is breathed into space; no mortal ear can hear the sound; it is the voice of a living ghost.

"What do you want?"

"Where is the sun? Where is the stars?"

"Dead! Clifford has killed them!"

"Then there is nothing to live for. Come with me to the river."

"No, no!"

"Come with me, come with me. There is light at the bottom. Listen to the plash of the water. It is singing a lullaby. Have you not suffered enough? You have only one heart, and it is broken. Why do you linger?"

"Hush! Do you not hear?"

"What?"

"A baby's cry. No, it is fancy—the voice of conscience. I will not come with you. I will not kill the unborn!"

"Fool! It will be a merciful deed. If your child is a man, he will be like Clifford, and will break a loving woman's heart, as yours is broken. If it is a girl, she will be as you are now, wandering in the black shroud of the world. We are at the brink of the river. The water is cool and refreshing. Take my hand, and we will plunge in together."

"I will not, I will not! My sin is great; I will not add to it."

The ghostly shade seizes me by the hair. I struggle with it; I shriek for help. . . .

* * * * *

"Will you not be quiet? Attend to me, obstinate one, or you shall be tied down."

Again my nurse. The horrible dream is over.

"I am quiet, nurse. It was a dream that frightened me. I thought it was real. Do not hold me so tight; you hurt me. I will

be quite quiet. You are a nurse, and ought to know that I am as weak as a child. Thank you, thank you. O, you can trust me! I am not a good woman, but you can trust me."

"There, my pretty one, I am sorry for you. I did not mean to hurt you, but there is another to take care of as well as you. Yes, you are weak now, but you are very strong sometimes. Your face is wet, your hair is in disorder. When you were little your mother used to do what I am doing for you."

"I do not remember."

"You can remember, if you try. I am twice your age, and I remember well. There were four of us, all girls. Our friends said there were more than enough of us. All the other married people had only two each—just two, no more; they said it was the proper number. We were four, and to-day we are all living."

"Your sisters are not like me."

"How?"

"They are good women?"

"Oh, yes, they are good—as good as their neighbours. Don't talk so much of goodness, my pretty one; it is a mistake. Life is not too long. It is when the sun shines that we should enjoy the warmth. Now you look sweet and clean. You feel so, do you not? Where is she, your mother?"

"Dead, long ago."

"But there must be someone. You did not grow up like a weed. You are a flower, and if you are clever you have a fine time before you. Someone must have cared for you; you have been well taught."

"I will not speak of her. I was wicked and ungrateful to her."

There is a long silence; a shivering fit seizes me; my limbs are trembling beneath the bed-clothes.

"Nurse!"

"Yes, my pretty one?"

"Give me something to drink. I am fainting."

"Alas, my child, there is nothing."

"Is there no money in my purse?"

"No, my child. I spent the last, as you bade me, and every drop is drank."

Another silence, during which I grope under the mattress. Presently:

"Here is an English sovereign, nurse. Go, and buy what I want."

"You are clever. Yes, my pretty one, I will go."

Again, for a little while, I conquer the demon that is driving me mad. . .

* * * * *

Oh, my baby, my treasure, my sweet angel from heaven! She was in my arms, her little hand in mine. I opened my eyes, and gazed upon her lovely face. I closed them, and folded her to my breast. The demon was vanguished. It was day, and the sun was shining. It was night and I saw the stars.

"There, my pretty one," said my nurse. "You are happy now."

"I am. I ought not to be. I am a wicked mother. I have no milk to give my child."

"That is right, the doctor says. It would

not do—no it would not do. She will be better as it is, and so will you be. She will grow up beautiful, like you."

"Is beauty a blessing, nurse?"

"Listen to the pretty mother. Is beauty a blessing? If it was only to be purchased for money, what sums would be paid for it? What would the world be without beauty, my pretty mother? Beauty and pleasure—that makes a song we are all glad to sing."

There was a thought in my mind. If time would stand still! If there were no to-morrow!

"Is it really true, nurse, as you have told me, that I am very violent sometimes?"

"It is true, O, yes, my pretty mother. Many times, many times."

"And strong?"

"Very strong. To look at you now it is not to be believed! But it is true for all that."

"And that I do not know what I am doing?"

"It is as I have said."

"Do not let me hurt my baby!"

"It shall not be. What am I here for? I will see to it."

"Something is coming into the room, nurse!"

"It is your fancy—nothing more."

"It is not my fancy. Clifford is here—at last, at last. Clifford! Clifford!"

He stood, with folded arms, his face to mine. I called to him, entreated him, implored him to confess that the base story he had told me was a lie. He did not move; he did not speak. I continued to implore. I asked him to take his child in his arms, and, if his story was true, to remove the burden of shame which is killing me, to give me the right, even at this late hour, to look my fellow-creatures in the face. Still he neither spoke nor moved. And where was my child? It was gone from my side; it had been taken from me.

"You shall not rob me of her!" I screamed, and would have flung myself upon him, but I

was thrust back, and imprisoned by stronger arms than mine.

A vapour floated before me. My voice failed me; my mind was a blank. . . .

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END OF VOL. I.

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